

JOE SACCO

AUTHOR OF FOOTNOTES IN GAZA

JOURNALISM

ALSO BY JOE SACCO

Palestine

Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992–95

Notes from a Defeatist

The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo

War's End: Profiles from Bosnia 1995–96

But I Like It

Footnotes in Gaza

JOURNALISM

JOURNALISM


JOE SACCO



METROPOLITAN BOOKS HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY NEW YORK



Metropolitan Books
Henry Holt and Company, LLC
Publishers since 1866
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10010
www.henryholt.com

Metropolitan Books® and  are registered trademarks of
Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

Copyright © 2012 by Joe Sacco
All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sacco, Joe.
Journalism / Joe Sacco. — 1st U.S. ed.
p. cm.

“This volume collects most all the shorter reporting pieces I have done over the years for magazines, newspapers, and book anthologies. As such, it seems to call for some sort of introductory fusillade to rout all those who would naysay the legitimacy of comics as an effective means of journalism”—P.

eISBN 978-1-4668-3231-2

1. Military history, Modern—20th century—Comic books, strips, etc. 2. Military history, Modern—21st century—Comic books, strips, etc. 3. War—Comic books, strips, etc. 4. Society and war—Comic books, strips, etc. I. Title.

D431.S23 2012
355.0209—dc23

2011052079

Henry Holt books are available for special promotions and premiums.
For details contact: Director, Special Markets.

First U.S. Edition 2012

Designed by Kelly S. Too

Printed in China
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To Paul Copley and Hal Swafford,
teachers and friends*

CONTENTS

Preface: A Manifesto Anyone?	xi
THE HAGUE	1
The War Crimes Trials	2
THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES	9
Hebron: A Look Inside	10
Gaza Portfolio	14
The Underground War in Gaza	22
THE CAUCASUS	27
Chechen War, Chechen Women	29
What Refugees?	70
IRAQ	73
Complacency Kills	74
Down! Up!	82
Trauma on Loan	98
MIGRATION	107
The Unwanted	109
INDIA	159
Kushinagar	160
Acknowledgments	191

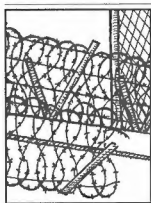
PREFACE

A MANIFESTO, ANYONE?

This volume collects most all the shorter reporting pieces I have done over the years for magazines, newspapers, and book anthologies. As such, it seems to call for some sort of introductory fusillade to rout all those who would naysay the legitimacy of comics as an effective means of journalism.

But before we commence firing, perhaps we should hear out the dissenters. After all, their objections may have merit. How should we respond, for example, when they question the notion that drawings can aspire to objective truth? Isn't that—objective truth—what journalism is all about? Aren't drawings by their very nature subjective?

The answer to this last question is yes. There will always exist, when presenting journalism in the comics form, a tension between those things that can be verified, like a quote caught on tape, and those things that defy verification, such as a drawing purporting to represent a specific episode. Drawings are interpretive even when they are slavish renditions of photographs, which are generally perceived to capture a real moment literally. But there is nothing *literal* about a drawing. A cartoonist assembles elements deliberately and places





them with intent on a page. There is none of the photographer's luck at snapping a picture at precisely the right moment. A cartoonist "snaps" his drawing at any moment he or she chooses. It is this choosing that makes cartooning an inherently subjective medium.

This does not let the cartoonist who aspires to journalism off the hook. The journalist's standard obligations—to report accurately, to get quotes right, and to check claims—still pertain. But a comics journalist has obligations that go deeper than that. A writer can breezily describe a convoy of UN vehicles as "a convoy of UN vehicles" and move on to the rest of the story. A comics journalist must *draw* a convoy of vehicles, and that raises a lot of questions. So, what do these vehicles look like? What do the uniforms of the UN personnel look like? What does the road look like? And what about the surrounding hills?

Fortunately, there is no stylebook to tell the comics journalist how far he or she must go to get such details right. The cartoonist draws with the essential truth in mind, not the literal truth, and that allows for a wide variety of interpretations to accommodate a wide variety of drawing styles. No two cartoonists are going to draw a UN truck exactly the same way even if working from the same reference material.

Here I can only lay out my own standards as far as pictorial veracity is concerned. I try to draw people and objects as accurately as possible whenever possible. To my mind, anything that *can* be drawn accurately *should* be drawn accurately—by which I mean a drawn thing must be easily recognizable as the real thing it is meant to represent. However, there are drawings—particularly in scenes that take place in the past that I did not see myself—for which I must necessarily use my imagination, or, rather, my *informed* imagination. By this I mean that whatever I draw must have grounding in the specifics of the time, place, and situation I am trying to re-create. In film terms, a cartoonist is a set designer, a costume designer, and a casting director, and to successfully carry out those roles probably requires research in books, archives, and on the Internet. When relying on eyewitness testimony, I ask pertinent *visual* questions: How many people were there? Where was the barbed wire? Were the people sitting or standing? At the minimum I want to orient readers to a particular moment, but my goal is to satisfy an eyewitness that my drawn depiction essentially represents his or her experience.

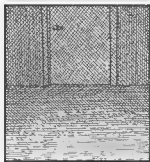
But, as I have implied, this can hardly be a perfect undertaking. Ultimately, a drawing reflects the vision of the individual cartoonist.

I do not think this exiles a drawn report from the realm of journalism. I think it is possible to strive for accuracy within a drawn work's subjective framework. In other words, facts (a truck carrying prisoners came down the road) and subjectivity (how that scene is drawn) are not mutually exclusive. I, for one, embrace the implications of subjective reporting and prefer to highlight them. Since it is difficult (though not impossible) to draw myself out of a story, I usually don't try. The effect, journalistically speaking, is liberating. Since I am a "character" in my own work, I give myself journalistic permission to show my interactions with those I meet. Much can be learned about people from these personal exchanges, which most mainstream newspaper reporters, alas, excise from their articles. (The stories journalists tell around a dinner table, which generally involve similar interactions, are often more interesting and revealing than what gets into their copy.) Despite the impression they might try to give, journalists are not flies on the wall that are neither seen nor heard. In the field, when reporting, a journalist's presence is almost always felt. Young men shake their guns in the air when a camera crew starts filming, and they police each other when a reporter starts asking probing questions. By admitting that I am present at the scene, I mean to signal to the reader that journalism is a process with seams and imperfections practiced by a human being—it is not a cold science carried out behind Plexiglas by a robot.

This brings us to American journalism's Holy of Holies, "objectivity." To be clear, I have no trouble with the word itself, if it simply means approaching a story without any preconceived ideas at all. The problem is I don't think most journalists approach a story that has any importance in that way. I certainly can't. An American journalist arriving on the tarmac in Afghanistan does not immediately drop her American views to become a blank slate on which her new, sharp-eyed observations can now be impressed. Does she suddenly stop thinking of the American soldiers she is following as basically decent, well-meaning countrymen who share many of her values in order to assess them as instruments of a nation-state operating in its own interest as—objectively speaking—they are? At the very best, she tries to report on their actions and behavior honestly whatever her own sympathies. As the legendary American journalist Edward R. Murrow said, "Everyone is a prisoner of his own experiences. No one can eliminate prejudices—just recognize them."

Another trap promoted in American journalism schools is the slavish adherence to "balance." But if one side says one thing





and the other side says another, does the truth necessarily reside “somewhere in the middle”? A journalist who says, “Well, I pissed off both sides—I must be doing something right,” is probably fooling himself and, worse, he may be fooling the reader. Balance should not be a smokescreen for laziness. If there are two or more versions of events, a journalist needs to explore and consider each claim, but ultimately the journalist must get to the bottom of a contested account independently of those making their claims. As much as journalism is about “what they said they saw,” it is about “what I saw for myself.” The journalist must strive to find out what is going on and tell it, not neuter the truth in the name of equal time.

I’ve picked the stories I wanted to tell, and by those selections my own sympathies should be clear. I chiefly concern myself with those who seldom get a hearing, and I don’t feel it is incumbent on me to balance their voices with the well-crafted apologetics of the powerful. The powerful are generally excellently served by the mainstream media or propaganda organs. The powerful should be quoted, yes, but to measure their pronouncements against the truth, not to obscure it. If I believe power brings out the worst in people, I’ve observed that those on the short end of the stick don’t always acquit themselves well either, and I’ve endeavored to report that. I think the great British journalist Robert Fisk gets the equation about right: “I always say that reporters should be neutral and unbiased on the side of those who suffer.”

In short, the blessing of an inherently interpretive medium like comics is that it hasn’t allowed me to lock myself within the confines of traditional journalism. By making it difficult to draw myself out of a scene, it hasn’t permitted me to make a virtue of dispassion. For good or for ill, the comics medium is adamant, and it has forced me to make choices. In my view, that is part of its message.

JOE SACCO

April 2011

JOURNALISM



THE HAGUE

**ALL
RISE!**

And we all rise in Courtroom One at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, the Netherlands for the solemn moment and majesty of...

the WAR CRIMES TRIALS

This is History, baby, with a capital H, the first international war crimes trials since the Nuremberg court put the likes of Goering and Hess in the dock...

Written and drawn by JOE SACCO
© 1998
Color by BUEA PATTON

But the judges striding in today haven't brought the victors' mighty gavel to crack down on a vanquished foe...

They've come with a United Nations mandate to sort crimes and atrocities committed by all sides in Balkan wars

The only other time I've been to court was to watch a friend argue down a traffic fine. But the accused at today's pre-trial motions, Dr. Milan Kovacevic, a Bosnian Serb hospital director, is in considerably hotter water...

Genocide. Acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, or religious group.

The prosecution says Kovacevic played a key role in setting up notorious camps—transit centers, he once called them—as Serbs expelled Muslims and Croats from the Prijedor area at the beginning of the Bosnian War...



The tribunal has already heard what went on in those camps at the trial of Dusko Tadic, a Bosnian Serb and former karate instructor

Witness after witness described the living conditions

the interrogations, the killings.

and the cases of sexual assault

Q "WERE YOU ORDERED TO LICK HIS ARSE, MR H?"

"YES"

Q "WAS MR G ORDERED TO SUCK HIS PENIS?"

"YES"

Q "WAS THE NEXT ORDER FOR MR G TO BITE HIS TESTICLES?"

"YES"

And Mr G bit off the man's testicle

The victim Fikret Harambasic, wasn't the only Muslim savaged that day. Witnesses saw bloody bodies, a man being cut as 'one slices chops', but the court said no deaths had been proven. It noted, though, that four of those assaulted, including Harambasic, were never seen again.

**BITE!
HARDER!
HARDER!**

After the war, before he was nabbed by British soldiers, Dr Kovacevic told a reporter -

WHAT WE DID WAS THE SAME AS AUSCHWITZ OR DACHAU, BUT IT WAS A MIS-TAKE

IT WAS PLANNED TO HAVE BEEN A CAMP, BUT NOT A CONCENTRATION CAMP

One of his attorneys, Anthony D'Amato, a professor at Northwestern Law School, tells me that Kovacevic wanted to resign from the council overseeing the operation, but -

THEY SAID THEY WOULD SHOOT HIM

HE HAD HEARD ABOUT THE ATROCITIES IN THE CAMPS

HE DIDN'T WANT TO BE PART OF THE SCENE ANYMORE.

The scene, the scene...

That and other scenes were played out years ago and hundreds of miles away...

I was in Bosnia in the fall and early winter of '95-'96

One scene after another was re-played for my benefit...



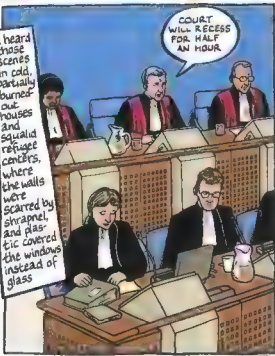
I DON'T WANT TO MEET THE NEIGHBORS WHO KILLED MY HUSBAND AND SON. NO ONE WHO WASN'T IN THEIR HANDS CAN KNOW WHAT THAT FEAR WAS...

THEY TOOK TWO WOMEN FROM THE MATERNITY WARD AND BROUGHT THEM BACK AT NINE IN THE MORNING. THEY CAME BACK CRYING, SCREAMING.

AT NIGHT THE SERBS WERE BRINGING PEOPLE—EVEN CHILDREN, WOMEN—AND YOU COULD HEAR SPLASHING IN THE RIVER... THEY SHOT THEM, BUT THEY PREFERRED TO CUT THEIR THROATS.

I heard those scenes in cold, partially burned-out houses and squalid refugee centers, where the walls were scarred by shrapnel and plastic covered the windows instead of glass.

COURT WILL RECESS FOR HALF AN HOUR.



There were thousands of such scenes, thousands of war criminals to go along with them, but the tribunal has fewer than 30 indictments in custody.

24 of em are in this prison



Neither Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic nor Bosnian Serb military commander Ratko Mladic, the two "most wanted" suspects, are here. They, too, are charged with genocide.



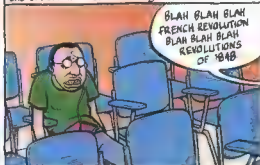
KARADZIC



MLADIC



The longer I'm in The Hague, the more I'm sucked into the courts' orderly deconstruction of some of recent history's foulest moments. I'm fascinated and stupefied by the sheer scope of the arguments, the expert witnesses droning on and on...



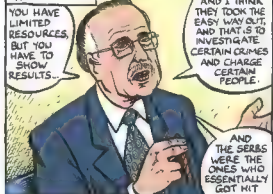
I can't stand the fact that trials are going on simultaneously, that I might be missing something more compelling at the one I'm not at...



I'm silently cheering judges who are trying valiantly to prod their cases along...



One of the tribunal's biggest problems, says Nikola Kostich, a former Milwaukee district attorney and a Serb-American defense lawyer, is the perception among some that its prosecution office is biased.



But around a place called Srebrenica, the evidence still being dug up by investigative teams is mounting.

What did Kostich think happened in Srebrenica? After all, he himself had represented one soldier who'd confessed to personally executing up to 70 Muslims there.

MAYBE SOMETHING WAS DOWN THERE THAT WAS NOT GOOD

THERE ARE NO HARD FACTS YET

I MAYBE DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE IT EITHER, RIGHT?

I WOULD FEEL VERY SAD IF THIS OCCURRED THAT WAY THAT WOULD BOTHER ME

I'M A HUMAN BEING IN ADDITION TO BEING A DEFENSE ATTORNEY.

Ah, but a defense attorney is a defense attorney is a defense attorney. I ask Houston defense attorney Tom Moran about his Muslim client, who, among other things, is accused of killing an elderly Serb by nailing a political badge to his head. Is he innocent?

IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS...

WHAT I CARE ABOUT IS WHETHER THE PROSECUTOR CAN PROVE BEYOND A REASONABLE DOUBT WHAT'S IN THE INDICTMENT

AND IF THE PROSECUTOR CAN'T DO IT, MY GUY IS NOT GUILTY

DOESN'T MEAN HE'S INNOCENT

The massacre of thousands of Muslim men from there is a pivotal charge in the genocide cases against that elusive Dynamic Duo of War Crimes Suspects, Karadzic (whom Kostich has conferred with from time to time) and Mladic (who was "a lot of fun" when Kostich met him).

Anyway, he says his client was too small a player for an international court to be going after.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS, THIS TRIBUNAL WAS SET UP FOR TWO PEOPLE—RADOVAN KARADZIC AND RATKO MLADIC—AND THEY MAY VERY WELL BE INNOCENT.

AND UNLESS SOMEONE DOES SOMETHING TO GET THEM HERE, THIS TRIBUNAL MAY AS WELL PACK UP AND GO HOME.

The prosecutor's office insists it's building a case against the big fish by frying the smaller fish first. And the tribunal bigwigs don't buy the argument that success should be pegged to any couple of war crimes suspects, no matter how notorious



The tribunal is dependent on others to apprehend suspects, and so it can't possibly bring every war criminal to justice — and now, with Kosovo erupting, it might have even more war crimes suspects to indict. Still, justice is worth pursuing for its own sake...



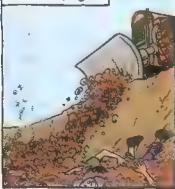
But some say this tribunal and the one dealing with Rwanda exist today because of collective Western guilt



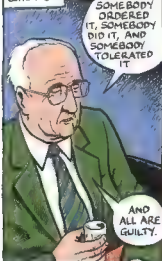
For years we watched the butchery from our living rooms, and now that it's over we've dressed ourselves in robes and decided to do something about it after all.



Pronouncing the word genocide after the fact is a lot safer than stopping it



It's like Bosnian lawyer Salih Karabdzic, who survived the siege of Sarajevo, tells me—

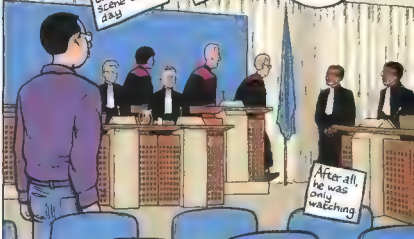


And remember that bicycle incident I told you about?

Well, the court determined that the accused, Dusko Tadic, was in the crowd of the Bosnian Serbs cheering the scene that day

They got Tadic on 11 counts, but that wasn't one of them...

ALL RISE!



Details commissioned "The War Crimes Trials" during the short stint when Art Spiegelman was the magazine's comics editor. I spent slightly less than two weeks at the International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, the Netherlands, in May 1998. For me, the experience of watching the wheels of justice turn, however imperceptibly, was a satisfying cap to the reporting I'd done in Bosnia. Unfortunately, my visit to The Hague ended on a sour note. I had scheduled meetings with the two most important jurists involved in the war crimes trials at the time, Louise Arbour, chief prosecutor for both the former Yugoslavia and the Rwanda tribunals, and Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, president of the former Yugoslavia tribunal and a presiding judge, but they declined to do on-the-record interviews. My conference with them was a bizarre, demeaning episode. McDonald had obtained a number of my comics and had them on the table in front of her. Both she and Arbour had copies of *Details*, too. They insisted they did not object to a story about the tribunal in the comics form per se, but that *Details* magazine, with its glossy photos of spoiled young men and saucily clad women, was not an appropriate forum for an article about

such serious matters as war crimes. McDonald read to me some brutal charges from a number of indictments to make her point. Forty-five minutes later, after using every argument I could think of to change their minds, they condescended to do the interviews if I would not quote them or attribute anything to them. In other words, they would talk to me only on background. This is why the last page of "The War Crimes Trials" is weak. It should have been the chief officers of the court who explained the great importance of the work being done at The Hague, not me.

"The War Crimes Trials" appeared in *Details*, September 1998



THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

HEBRON:

A LOOK INSIDE

An evil electricity crackles through the West Bank town—the sparks that arise when two peoples who hate each other rub together. TIME sent comic journalist Joe Sacco there for two weeks. He captured this fresh, provocative view

Colors by Rhea Patton

The taxis bringing us to Hebron can go no farther

We jump out and make a run for the earthen barricade the Israelis have laid across the main road to hinder the movement of Palestinians

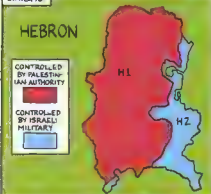
We're lucky, says my guide Salem. Cause usually Israeli soldiers are here to harass the people, but who wants to be out in this muck?

There's a slippery dash for taxis on the other side

By the time we find one with room, 10 minutes later, we're soaked

But the way to Hebron is now clear

Hebron is the West Bank's most contentious town, the only one that's divided, the only one with Jewish settlers—who began to establish themselves in the late 1960s—living cheek by jowl with Palestinians



In peace process-speak, the Palestinian Authority controls H1, 80% of Hebron, the Israeli military controls the rest, H2.

Let's face it, you have to be ultracommitted to move your family to the heart of a town whose 120,000 residents loathe you, and spokesman David Wilder and the 500 or so other Hebron settlers are just that. Originally from New Jersey, Wilder says it's perhaps the climax of returning to one's roots for a Jew to live here



In the Israeli zone, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, Judaism's second holiest site, is underneath the Haram al-Khalil, Islam's fourth holiest place. For 700 years, until Israel occupied the West Bank in 1967, Jews were not allowed to worship inside. "If we were not here," says Wilder, "no Jew would get anywhere close to it."



"It's not a holy site for Jews," insists Nizar Ramadan, a writer associated with Hebron's fundamentalist Islamic movement. He says Israeli-imposed curfews and the other restrictions that often keep Muslim worshippers from the Haram are a deep discrimination and a new kind of Nazism.

Many Palestinians charge the armed settlers and the soldiers who guard them with abuse and assault. Wilder charges back, "The Arabs are extremely good at lying."



In his view, it's the settlers—in their fortified compounds—who are under siege.

Jews had coexisted with Arabs in Hebron for hundreds of years until shortly after a massacre of 67 Jews by Arabs in 1929, and without the large Israeli army garrison to protect them now—

THERE WOULD BE A BLOOD-BATH HERE



When shots are fired from H1 at the settlers, Israel punishes the 40,000 Palestinians under its control in H2 with a curfew.



The curfew can last months at a time, with breaks of a few hours only every few days.

The curfew prevents Majed Natshe from getting to his sweets shop job in H1. He's lost all his savings, he says.

SOME-TIMES I BREAK THE CURFEW TO GO TO WORK.

AND TO GET NECESSARY THINGS FOR THE CHILDREN, DRUGS FOR MY MOTHER.



ALSO MY WIFE IS PREGNANT. SHE HAS BASIC NEEDS.

He's been shot at three times while breaking the curfew in the back streets of H2, he says.

Wilder says the curfew is the PRICE PAID FOR WHAT THEY ARE DOING.



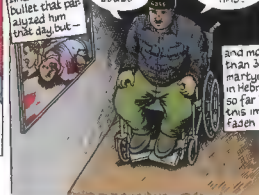
A CURFEW DOESN'T ENDANGER ANYBODY'S LIFE. THE BULLETS THEY ARE SHOOTING AT US DO.

Other bullets, February 1994: Mohammed Abu Ilhalaaweh, a father of four, was at the Haram al-Khalil mosque when settler Dr. Baruch Goldstein from nearby Kiryat Arba walked in and killed 29 worshippers.

A gruesome photo on the wall reminds Abu Ilhalaaweh of the bullet that paralyzed him that day, but—

THE CASUALTIES OF THE PAST ARE NO LONGER ACKNOWLEDGED.

NOBODY CARES FOR OUR NEEDS BECAUSE THERE ARE NEW CASUALTIES, NEW VICTIMS.



and more than 30 martyrs in Hebron so far in this intifadah.

At the University Graduates Union in H1, I take a sweet from a large bowl and then shake hands with a man whose teenage son was killed by Israeli soldiers three or four days earlier. I'm steered to the front, between rows of men drinking bitter coffee and listening to the exhortations of one speaker after another. Eventually dozens of masked youths march in and face the crowd.



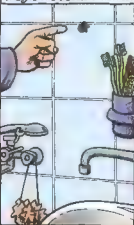
Someone leans over and says, 'In America when someone dies you cry. Here we have a party.'

The settlers mourn too. Wilder tells me his daughter's teacher, from another settlement, was killed on a road just outside Hebron. Settlers are sandbagging their windows.



IT'S LIKE LIVING IN A BUNKER

We're back on the bullets. I'm shown where they've hit settlers' homes.



One bullet entered a bedroom in the Tel Rumeida trailer of Bracha Ben Yitzhak where four of her children were sleeping.



IT'S A MIRACLE THAT NOTHING HAPPENED BECAUSE THE ARABS ARE TRYING TO KILL US.

IT'S WAR HERE

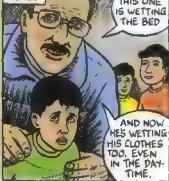
If it's war, the settlers aren't satisfied with how the Israeli army is conducting it. When you're being shot at 'from a particular source night after night, what do you do?' asks Wilder. 'You level the house! Very simple to do... And they don't do it.'

RESULTS OF ISRAELI FIRE ON THE HARET AL-SHEIKH NEIGHBORHOOD, H1



I tell Wilder I've visited Palestinian homes hit by Israeli fire. Civilians live in them. 'But they're shooting from those homes,' he insists. If the Israeli army is hitting homes, its spokesman, Lieut. Colonel Olivier Rasowicz, claims, 'we are very careful and very accurate and only responding to the source of fire.'

Yasser Qawasm's home was raked by Israeli bullets. He denies it was a 'source of fire.' He says his children now have nightmares.



THIS ONE IS WETTING THE BED

AND NOW HE'S WETTING HIS CLOTHES TOO, EVEN IN THE DAY-TIME.

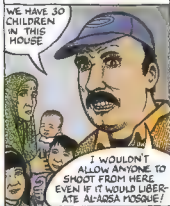
Palestinians in Hebron have been killed in their homes. Fatina al-foknouri was wounded.



With one of the only English words he knows, her husband Sharif invites me to inspect where Israeli projectiles have punched through the walls.



Through an interpreter, I ask him if his home, which houses his extended family, was used by gunmen to shoot at the settlers.

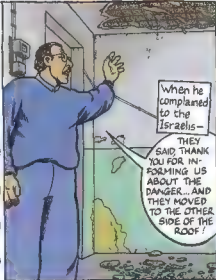


Some of the positions from which Israeli troops fire are forcibly seized Palestinian rooftops in H2.



"We have to be where we have to be to prevent violence from the other side," Rasowicz says.

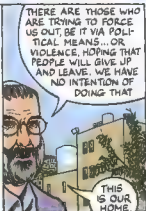
Israeli soldiers are on Izz al-Sharabati's roof. He claims they've dumped garbage, urine and excrement on the rest of his house. He says this ceiling is crumbling because soldiers were moving and firing a heavy machine gun on top.



WHY DON'T THEY PUT THIS MILITARY POSITION ON THE ROOFS OF THE SETTLERS?



Attached as the settlers are to Hebron, any eventual peace deal will probably mean uprooting them? "Military force," predicts Amiram Goldblum, who tracks settlements for the Israeli protest movement Peace Now.



Meanwhile Abu Ithalaweh says his home is only half a kilometer from the grave of Dr. Baruch Goldstein, who was budgeoned to death at the scene of the mosque attack. He says on the anniversary of Goldstein's crime and other occasions, settlers gather at the grave.



GAZA PORTFOLIO

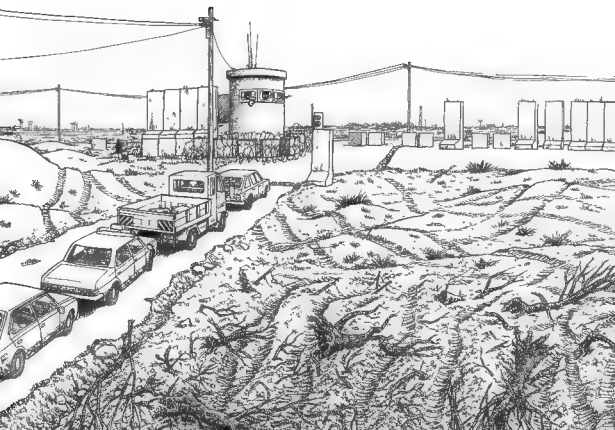
Sabha Abu Mousa searched for her daughter-in-law's two gold bracelets in the rubble of her home, which was demolished by the Israel Defense Forces, in the Khan Younis refugee camp.





Khan Younis refugee camp (left)

The Israeli checkpoint at Abu Houli that divided
Khan Younis and the southern Gaza Strip from
the north (below)



Palestinian fishermen cut off from the Mowasi enclave (which contained a Jewish settlement bloc) by an Israeli closure were unable to operate or maintain their boats and equipment for months.



Boys in Khan Younis followed a truck that announced the funeral of another "martyr."



Boys from the Khan Younis refugee camp moving up a dune toward an Israeli jeep. The soldiers taunted the children ("Come on, dogs!" and "Your mother's cunt!") and sometimes shot at them when they approached too close or threw stones.



The Underground War in Gaza

As the peace process lurches forward (and backward), towns like Rafah are still at war. A comic-book journalist reports on the battle over Palestinian tunnels and Israeli bulldozers.

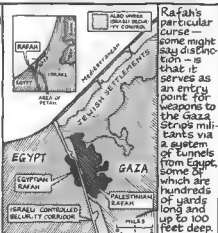
By Joe Sacco



A woman motions me over, and I duck through her doorway. The house behind her is being demolished. She's wondering if her house is next. If it is, she doesn't know where she's going to go.



In Rafah, talk of the "road map to peace" and of moving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict toward a resolution is drowned out by the sounds of bulldozing and machine-gun fire. Rafah—whose 105,000 residents are overwhelmingly refugees—is one of the most militant Palestinian towns, hemmed in on two sides by Jewish settlements and by an Israeli-controlled security zone along the border. The Israel Defense Forces (I.D.F.) considers Rafah its most active "front."



And this man, nicknamed Colonel Pinky, is charged with destroying them. He is the commander of the I.D.F.'s Southern Brigade of the Gaza Strip Division. The I.D.F. claims that terrorists sometimes slip through the tunnels, but mainly that they are used for smuggling.



RIGHT NOW MOST OF THE SMUGGLING IS FOR AMMUNITION.

THE BIG MONEY IS WITH AMMUNITION.



Colonel Pinky judges his success by the price of a bullet in Rafah. The fewer the tunnels, the higher the price. He says a bullet now costs up to 21 shekels (about \$450), the highest it's ever been. But that's not good enough, he says. He wants "zero smuggling in my area."

Colonel Pinky is taking me along the narrow Israeli-controlled corridor that divides Palestinian Rafah from Egyptian Rafah, an area so heavily bulldozed that rows of houses that once stood here have been ground down to sand.

More than 800 housing units have been destroyed since the beginning of this intifada, according to the Rafah Governorate. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (Unrwa), which provides aid to Palestinian refugees, puts the number at about 580—but it counts even a multi-unit structure as a single house.

Colonel Pinky estimates that his bulldozers have demolished between 300 and 400 homes. (An I.D.F. spokesman in Jerusalem later tells me that only "a few dozen" of these were inhabited and suggests that the rest were "abandoned" or unfinished or perhaps sheds for animals.)

Colonel Pinky and I stand behind a 25-foot-high metal wall, which his forces are building as cover from Palestinian sniping. It also goes deep underground to create a barrier to the tunnels.



WE HAVE A LEGAL RIGHT TO DESTROY A HOME WHEN THE HOME IS USED FOR TERROR OPERATIONS.

Houses are destroyed, he says, if they serve as "piers" for tunnels—more than 56 have been discovered so far, according to the I.D.F. Sometimes hidden under tile floors or furniture—or if Palestinian militants use them to launch rifle, grenade or anti-tank attacks on his men.

One of his battalion commanders, Lt. Col. Avi, insists.



WE DON'T JUST RANDOMLY DESTROY HOMES.

To demolish a home, he says, he must submit a request that goes all the way up to the "legal adviser of the entire army." (According to the I.D.F. though, this procedure only applies to houses it considers "inhabited.")

O.K., I say, let's talk about the destruction of one particular home. It belonged to someone I know—let's call him T—and it was demolished not four days before, along with a few other dwellings.

Colonel Avi knows the houses. He says gunmen used them as cover to shoot at a bulldozer.

YOU CALL THIS A HOME. WE CALL THIS A MILITARY POSITION.

IT'S AN EMPTY HOME. A VACANT HOME THAT NO FAMILY IS LIVING IN.

The IDF claim that houses demolished are mostly 'empty' may be technically accurate, but Palestinians say that it turns the truth on its head for example: a home was 'empty'—but only he says because he and his family were chased out by constant Israeli gunfire.



The Israelis have succeeded in driving a wedge between the people living near the border and the gunmen. Through Palestinians here support the resistance in general, I've heard the gunmen called 'useless' even 'collaborators' because their ineffective attacks often invite a crushing Israeli response.



Keeping the gunmen out is the 'main reason' Fuad stays in his family home near the border despite the entreaties of his parents. The Israelis, he says—

—DON'T NEED AN EXCUSE TO DEMOLISH YOUR HOUSE. BUT THEY CAN USE THE GUNMEN AS A REASON.



While his watchful presence in his home would seem to satisfy the interests of the IDF, he says Israeli bullets still hit the house randomly. (I was present during one incident.) Palestinians typically interpret that message as an injunction to flee.

As for the tunnels, the reaction of Sami and his neighbors is precisely what the IDF may have intended all along.

He shows me a tunnel entrance that they had completely blocked up with rubble.

WE DESTROYED THIS HOUSE BECAUSE OF A TUNNEL.

Sami says he and his neighbors attacked the smugglers who started this tunnel and chased them away.

He claims a smuggler offered him \$60,000 to use his house to build a tunnel—

—AND I REALIZED IT WOULD NOT BE FOR GUNS OR WEAPONS, BUT FOR DRUGS.

I COULD HAVE BEEN A RICH MAN IN ONE NIGHT.



But he says he wants nothing to do with the smugglers. He doesn't want to give the Israelis an excuse to destroy his home.

But even so, he can't be sure it will be spared. He says he believes the Israelis are using the issue of tunnels to extend the area they control along the border.



On the edge of Block 3, he points to a site where the Israelis found a tunnel—

—150 METERS FROM HERE! SO WHY DID THEY DESTROY THIS WHOLE AREA?

One Palestinian militant I talk to admits that the IDF has been about "90 percent successful" in its efforts to destroy tunnels but



NOW WE ARE NOT SO DEPENDENT ON THE TUNNELS AND ON EGYPT

WITH A FEW MATERIALS AVAILABLE HERE, SUGAR, FOR EXAMPLE, OR FERTILIZER, I CAN CREATE VERY POWERFUL EXPLOSIVE MATERIAL

He tells me Palestinians are even manufacturing bullets—not as good as "Russian" bullets, he says, but bullets just the same

I ask Colonel Pinky when the demolitions in Rafah will stop. When "There is no resistance and there is no shooting," he says "We want the tunnels to be stopped."



All things considered, he characterizes the Israeli response to Palestinian resistance and the tunnels as "gentle, if you can say gentle about something like this." If I wanted to see an army without restraint, he says, I should go to Chechnya.

Such distinctions may be lost on the 5,300 people Unrwa says have lost their homes here. But I doesn't seem bitter yet about the destruction of the house that he says he "spent all my life dreaming about."



In fact, after agonizing for weeks as the bulldozers drew nearer, he seems almost relieved now that the deed is done

YES, BEFORE I HAD HOPE, BUT NOW IT'S FINISHED



Incidentally, when I returned to Block O to look up the woman who had asked me what I would do in her place, I didn't find her

The whole row of houses, including hers, was gone

Two Palestinian Territories, Notes

I think of "Hebron. A Look Inside," which appeared in *Time* magazine, as my least successful piece of comics journalism. I cannot blame the senior editor, Joshua Cooper Ramo, who took a chance on comics journalism and supported me every step of the way. Working for that storied publication seemed to freeze me up, and I dispensed with my more typical first-person approach and reverted to the objective, tit-for-tat reporting I'd learned in journalism school. For this reason, I failed to adequately convey the great unfairness of making the free movement of tens of thousands of Palestinians hostage to the considerations of the few hundred militant Jewish settlers.

"Gaza Portfolio" includes both published and unpublished drawings meant to accompany an article my friend and colleague Chris Hedges wrote about Khan Younis, a town and refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. We sold ourselves as a team to Lewis Lapham, editor of *Harper's Magazine* at the time, and he commissioned our weeklong

trip to Gaza. Unfortunately, I don't think Mr. Lapham appreciated what I could possibly add to Chris's article with drawings, and he seemed dissatisfied with the ones that showed human faces. I was put off by his second-guessing and almost abandoned the project. As it was, the few drawings published were printed so small as to induce further despair.

I consider "The Underground War in Gaza" a successful project even though, like the *Time* piece about Hebron, I was given only four pages. Representing the *New York Times Magazine* opened doors for me at the Israeli Foreign Press Office, and Israeli spokespersons asked if I would like to spend a day and night with Israel Defense Forces soldiers manning their positions along the Egyptian border. That opportunity allowed me to convey Israeli concerns about weapons smuggling while still questioning the enormous scale of the IDF's home-demolition campaign. Readers of my book *Footnotes in Gaza* might note that the "T" character whose

home had just been demolished is Talal, the father of Ashraf, one of that book's main protagonists. Though I have nothing but good things to say about the editor who commissioned the piece, Paul Tough, the story passed through many hands, and there was some effort to get me to comply with the abbreviation commandments of the *New York Times* style guide. Additionally, I had to assure one editor that the background crosshatching on the second panel of the story's last page was not an effort to slip in a lot of little crucifixes.

"Hebron. A Look Inside" appeared in *Time*, March 12, 2001

Only two of the illustrations shown in "Gaza Portfolio" ("The Khan Younis refugee camp" and "The Israeli checkpoint...") accompanied the article by Chris Hedges, "A Gaza Diary," in *Harper's Magazine*, October 2001; one illustration, "Sabha Abu Mousa...", appeared in a revised form (without the female figure) none of the other illustrations were used

"The Underground War in Gaza" appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, July 6, 2003



THE CAUCASUS

CHECHEN WAR, CHECHEN WOMEN

I: GOING HOME

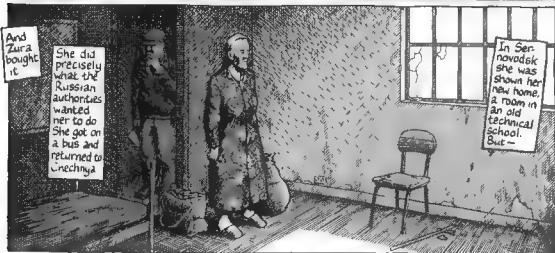
I'M NOT
GOING BACK
TO THAT
PLACE!

NO ONE
IS GOING TO
SEND ME
BACK TO
CHECHNYA!





In her tent, Zura tells me how she's fled the war in Chechnya and has been living here as an "Internally Displaced Person" (IDP) in the neighboring Russian republic of Ingushetia, in poor conditions but in safety when—





there is still a shooting war in Chechnya.

I COULDN'T STAND THE ROCKETS

I CAN'T STAND THE NOISE

I DIDN'T EVEN STAY OVER-NIGHT

"I got on the bus and came back."

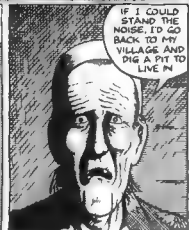


WHATEVER THEY PROMISE THE IDP'S IN CHECHNYA, IT DOESN'T MATTER

I JUST CAN'T BEAR THE NOISE



IF I COULD STAND THE NOISE, I'D GO BACK TO MY VILLAGE AND DIG A PIT TO LIVE IN



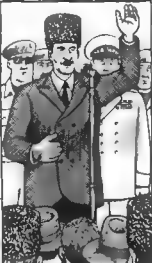
And so Zura returned to Sputnik, the first and biggest of the camps set up for Chechen IDP's in Ingushetia

As of October 2002, the total number of IDP's in the republic was 110,000, according to the Danish Refugee Council, whose count is considered the most accurate.

The Russian government has frozen its own tally. Its Migration Services hasn't registered an IDP since the spring of 2001 because Russia pretends that people are no longer fleeing its "anti-terrorist war" in Chechnya.



Chechnya's most recent anguish began in the early 1990s as the Soviet Union collapsed. The deep grievances of the Chechens against Moscow found radical expression in the person of Jokhar Dudayev, a former loyal Soviet general, who declared Chechnya's independence first thing after ascending to the presidency of the republic in 1991.



Chechnya, which is located in the North Caucasus, had a population of about 1.2 million, one quarter of whom were ethnic Russians. The Russians, who had enjoyed special privileges under the Soviets, made up the majority of the population of the capital Grozny.



Certainly the Russians but also many Chechens, did not want a total break with the Federation.



Dudayev steered Chechnya—whose independence was never recognized by any country—out of Moscow's political sphere. Civic life deteriorated and poverty was widespread. Government workers went without their salaries.



Corrupt Chechens and Russian politicians took advantage of the lack of regulations, customs-free borders, and general chaos to enrich themselves.



Meanwhile, the disputes between Dudayev's supporters and his internal opposition turned deadly.



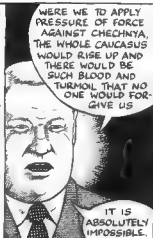
Dudayev had already dissolved Chechnya's parliament and constitutional court.

As Russia's media stoked long-held prejudices against the Chechens, the political will of Boris Yeltsin's government to negotiate with the problematic Dudayev ebbed.



Under increasing Russian threat, Chechens rallied to Dudayev.

Russia was already aiding and arming Chechen groups opposed to Dudayev's administration though Yeltsin still ruled out direct federal military intervention to pull the rebellious republic back into the fold.



However, newly positioned hardliners in Yeltsin's circle as well as right-wing nationalist rivals pushed the physically diminished Russian president to take harsher measures, which culminated in a military attack in December 1994.



Using overwhelming force including massive artillery barrages, the Russians devastated Chechen population centers



Shattered Grozny fell to badly bloodied Russian troops after a nearly three-month, block-by-block battle with Chechen fighters. Among the civilian dead—estimated as high as 27,000—were many of the city's ethnic Russians.



The Russian Interior Ministry set up "filtration camps" supposedly to capture Chechen fighters—which became synonymous with beatings, torture and murder, and whose chief victims were civilians.

Thousands were "filtered". 1500 are still missing.

Poorly trained and fed Russian conscripts were demoralized by a war they didn't understand. If they were wounded, even grievously, their government provided a pit-tance in compensation, if they were killed their mothers might have to travel hundreds of miles to identify and retrieve their bodies.

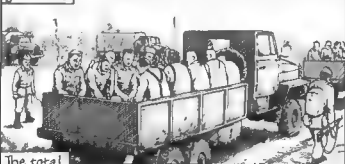
Conscripts sometimes fell victim to robberies and beatings by their ostensible comrades-in-arms, the notorious Interior Ministry contract soldiers—the kontraktniki—often ex-criminals, who preyed mainly on Chechen civilians.

The state of the Russian armed forces was a prescription for robbery, rape, and murder in the areas liberated from the "terrorists".

In August 1996, in a surprise offensive, Chechen separatists recaptured Grozny, dealing the Russians a stunning defeat.

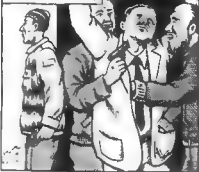


The Russians agreed to withdraw their troops and to negotiate the republic's final status with the Chechens in five years' time.



The total number of dead during the war was estimated between 30,000 and 80,000 (Dudayev was among those killed). More than 320,000 had fled their homes to become IDPs.

A new Chechen president, Aslan Maskhadov formerly chief of staff of Chechen forces, could not stop the post-war republic from descending into further lawlessness and economic chaos.



A number of dramatic events in 1999 deepened the crisis. First, two warlords led a raid from Chechnya into the neighboring Russian republic of Dagestan, where they declared an independent Islamic territory. (Their 'other' motives are the subject of some speculation.)



The raid precipitated the reemergence of the Moscow hawks. Yeltsin picked Vladimir Putin, the counterintelligence chief, to be Russia's prime minister.




Putin lost little time in confronting the warlords with force.


Next, a series of bomb blasts killed hundreds of Russians including scores in Moscow apartment buildings.



Though serious questions remain about the mysterious explosions, Moscow — which was itself implicated — was quick to blame the Chechens.




With popular backing, Rutin launched a second war on Chechnya in 1999. Federal forces took Grozny again after severe bombardments and house-to-house fighting and with seeming disregard for civilian losses.




Russian troops have managed to occupy most of Chechnya thereafter, but the separatists still operate and exact a toll.

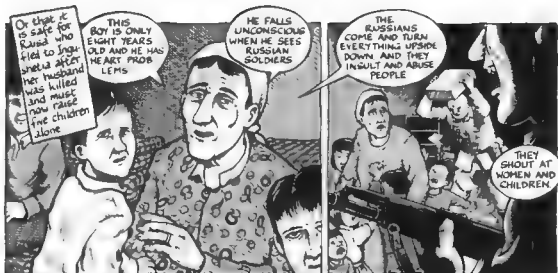
Large bombs—including suicide bombs—have brought death not just to Russian soldiers and their local supporters, but also to innocent bystanders in places like Grozny's markets.



Those who remain in Chechnya must also contend with the danger of landmines, the imposition of curfews, and the certainty of power and water cuts.



And into this chaos, Russia pretends that it is perfectly safe for people like Zura to return and start their lives again.



But despite all the stories that filter in from Chechnya despite what they know themselves, some IDPs still try to go back. Some feel their conditions in Ingushetia are too miserable to endure any longer.

Back in Spurtuk camp, I meet Larisa and her sister Fatima who tells me -

MY TENT WAS IN TERRIBLE CONDITIONS ESPECIALLY WHEN IT RAINED

I COULDN'T GET A NEW TENT

SO WHEN EVERYONE PUT IN AN APPLICATION [FOR CHECHNYA] I PUT MINE IN

EMERCOM, the Russian agency responsible for emergencies and natural disasters, promised her "a room with all the conveniences." And was so pleased when she agreed to move back that it sent a small truck to take her and her kids to Gudarmes, Chechnya.

The small room she was given was clean, she says, but came without gas or heat or a functioning sink. The toilet was outside.



Worse the humanitarian aid EMERCOM does out in Chechnya - it has stopped doing so in Ingushetia - is a tiny fraction of what her family needs

She says the monthly ration per person is one can of beef, one tin of condensed milk, one kilo of sugar, one kilo of rice, and one packet of tea

I repeat per month

And about that canned beef -

THE QUALITY IS SO BAD WE CAN'T EAT IT.



Her sister Larisa tells me she lives here in a tent holding 30 people where hanging sheets and blankets are the only partition between families



II. EVERY 50 YEARS

Asset lives in an abandoned milk factory called PTF Karabulak.

Her family has three cows, which are out to pasture.



WE HAD CATTLE BEFORE THE FIRST WAR BUT THEY WERE KILLED BY SOLDIERS

AND THIS TIME WE BROUGHT THE CATTLE WITH US. NOT SO MUCH FOR US, BUT OUT OF PITY FOR THEM.

WE DIDN'T WANT THEM TO BE SHOT

Asset knows full well that the recent wars are in a long series of historical disasters that have overtaken the Chechen people ever since the Russian empire pushed its way into the North Caucasus in the 1700s.

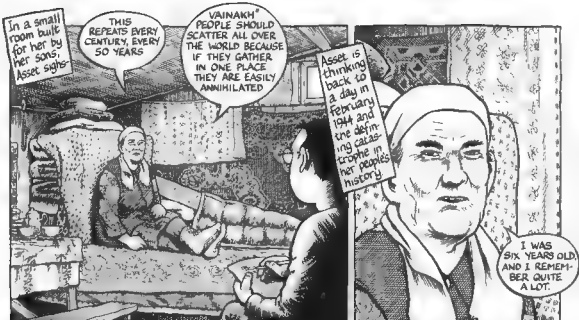


The rebellious Chechens - demonized as bandits by the Russians - were never fully subdued despite dozens of military expeditions to bring them to heel.

In the Soviet era, the Chechens resisted Stalin's agricultural collectivization. In one day in 1937 the Red Army rounded up and shot 14,000 Chechens.



But the worst was to come



"My mother had gone to the market to buy wool, and she couldn't reach our house because the soldiers had encircled the village and wouldn't let her pass through

"Only in the morning did she reach our family. I remember her running and screaming and carrying that bag of wool



* VAINAKH: THE NAME GIVEN TO THE CLOSELY RELATED CHECHEN AND INGUISH PEOPLE AS A WHOLE



"We were taken to the collective farm, and as each family arrived, the men from that family were allowed to join them."

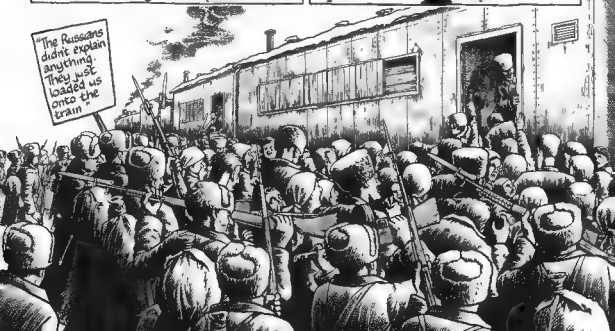


"Many families were separated. They couldn't find each other."

"The carts were set on fire. I saw for myself how the soldiers were shooting the horses."



"The Russians didn't explain anything. They just loaded us onto the train."



This was Stalin's final solution for the Chechens, whom he would later accuse of collaborating with the invading Nazis. His army had herded every Chechen and Ingush man, woman, and child onto trains — 12,000 carriages had been assembled for the task — and deported them en masse to Kazakhstan.

It must have been a 17- or 18-day journey

"At stops, young people ran for the food that was prepared at the stations. But the stops were short and too many people would be in line. And if the family didn't have plates, they didn't get food."



"When people had to go to the toilet they weren't allowed to go far from the carriage. When the train stopped they had to get off and do it right there."



"If someone crawled under the train to get to the other side, a soldier would beat them."

"Some people took wood from fences to make fires in the carriages



"There was a small iron oven in the carriage so we could heat and make bread



"I didn't have a blanket. [but] I was the favorite child. My parents and brothers tried to do everything so I wouldn't feel cold or hunger



"I remember an old woman who didn't have children and she stayed with our family.



"But the old woman died, and we knew the soldiers were throwing out the bodies leaving the bodies by the tracks.



"My father hid her body with some bags in the carriage

"When we arrived in Kazakhstan we were met by people with horses, oxen, and camels...from there we were taken to different villages"

"We lived together with a Kazakh family and other Chechen families..."

"My father was arrested soon after we arrived. They said he was a kulak."



"He joined the family again four and a half years later"

"My mother gave birth to a baby daughter, and they both died. My mother died a year after the stillbirth. She was in bed for a year"



Most of the deportees were forced to fend for themselves in the unfamiliar landscape. Within five years one quarter of them — 145,000 people — had died from cold and hunger.

*KULAK: DEROGATORY TERM SOVIETS APPLIED TO PROSPEROUS PEASANTS

What had been the republic of Chechen-Ingushetia ceased to exist. It was divided up and its parts transferred to neighboring Soviet republics. Russians and Dagestanis were settled in Chechen homes and the Soviets systematically set out to destroy Chechnya's cultural heritage.



The Chechens were rehabilitated by Khrushchev in 1957 and allowed to return to their homeland, which was reconstituted.



But they were never compensated for their losses or for the brutality meted out against them.

The common experience of the deportations has left its indelible mark upon the Chechens.



Asset sometimes returns to her hometown in Chechnya to pick up her modest monthly pension if her son can't make the trip for her.



Sometimes she visits her old house.

I ask her to describe what she sees.



"I see a destroyed place," she tells me, "abandoned, overgrown with weeds."



III. THE CAMPS

Let's say you are a Chechen running from the war

You get on a bus for Ingushetia capital, Nazran, and you arrive some hours later with only the clothes on your back

Where to then?

I ask Hazhan, who faced just such a proposition two weeks ago. She fled Chechnya with five children right after recovering from a bullet wound that had cut through her intestines in 13 places

I WAS AT THE BUS STATION, AND I ASKED THE PEOPLE IF THEY KNEW A PLACE WHERE I COULD STAY THE NIGHT WITH MY CHILDREN

And someone directed Hazhan to this automotive repair yard, Logovaz, in downtown Nazran, which has been partially given over to IDP's. It's a crowded facility with tents filling up the ground in front of the garages, but a few people made space for her inside a former storeroom

Including her and her five children, about 15 people live here now, she says

I DON'T WANT TO BE A BURDEN, AND THAT'S WHY I HAVE TO FIND A PLACE FOR MYSELF

Hazhan has done what so many Chechens have had to do, namely figure out accommodation for themselves. There is no one to meet and greet the IDP's that trickle into Ingushetia, no central agency that directs them to this room or that tent

Basically, new arrivals have one of three options:



they can fit themselves into a place like Logovaz which is known in the parlance of the Non-governmental Organizations (N.G.O's) as a "spontaneous settlement" basically an empty factory or facility already squatted by Chechens;

they can join one of the tent camps;



or, if they can afford to, they can rent a room or house for themselves

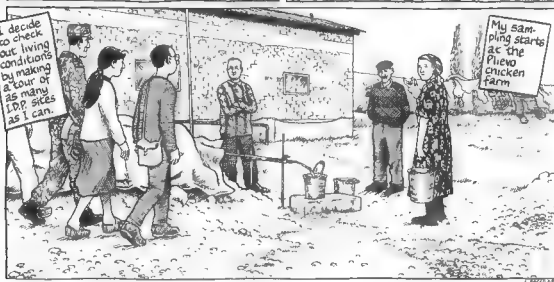


Many opt to rent when they first arrive in Ingushetia, but they move to the squalid spontaneous settlements or over-crowded tent camps when their money runs out

N.G.O's have struggled to provide the settlements and camps with basic facilities like toilets and baths and access to water, gas, and electricity



I decide to check out living conditions by making a tour of as many I.D.P. sites as I can.



My sampling starts at the Phevo chicken farm

I meet Aunt who agrees to show me her basement room



The place reeks so badly of mold that my head begins to spin

Her mother has rheumatism and her daughter has developed such a rash that she can't sleep

When it rains the stinking urine food is so stinky in the camp

We're building bunking in the shed to move there



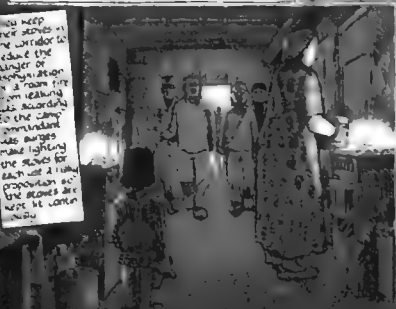
I walk over to inspect the shed she's talking about



It doesn't smell quite so moldy in here where the IDPs live in small partitioned rooms



They keep their stores in the corridor to reduce the danger of explosion. Design is a room fire from leaking gas according to the camp commandant who suggests using lighting the stores for each use a bulky proposition as the stores are where he works

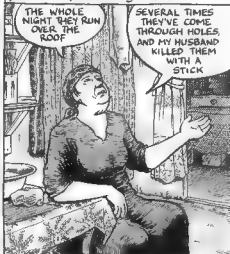


At Plievo, people hang their food from the ceiling to keep it from the rats





Her name is Zainap, and she lives near one of the camp toilets, which means her problem is particularly acute.



For Yaha, mice and cockroaches are the least of her worries



She lives in the sprawling ZhBi cement factory on the road from Nazran to Karabulak, which houses scores of IDP's

Parts of the plant are still operating



The dangers in this settlement abound. Yaha's eldest, Ilias, age 15, was killed when he touched an unprotected high-voltage cable.

WHENEVER I GO TO GET WATER I SEE THE PLACE WHERE MY SON DIED.

Her husband and a daughter were killed in Chechnya.

Yaha lives in this drafty former work shop with her five surviving children.

At the same settlement, some people motion me over to several large metal rings that open on an empty underground water reservoir.

One woman tells me that children playing here have fallen into the pit on a number of occasions.

She produces her four-year-old nephew.

He fell down there twice!

WERE YOU HURT?

NO I WASN'T!

Lucky kid! It's a 12-foot drop at least.

Now,
what
about
the tent
camps?



Some of
the biggest,
like Sputnik
are situated
in the middle
of nowhere,
close to the
Chechen
border.

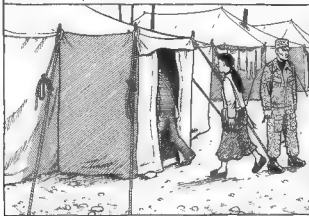
At Sputnik,
lines of
toilets ring
the tents or
are set off a
couple of
dozen meters
from the
dusty roads.



Many of
the old
toilets, al-
ready full,
have been
abandoned
where they
are.

They are
eyesores,
like the
tent camps
themselves

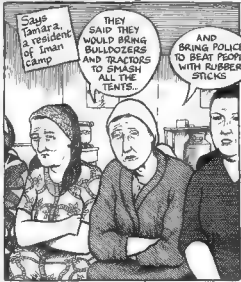
It is the tent camps—the most visible reminder that the war in Chechnya is not over—which most embarrass the Russian government. The Russians make bellicose statements about removing them, while promising the IDP's better facilities elsewhere.



Says
Tamara,
a resident
of Iman
camp

THEY
SAID THEY
WOULD BRING
BULDOZERS
AND TRACTORS
TO SMASH
ALL THE
TENTS...

AND
BRING POLICE
TO BEAT PEOPLE
WITH RUBBER
STICKS



But why not leave if the authorities have offered you better places? It isn't exactly pleasant here...

Ahhh, Zula explains to me, "pleasant" is relative.

WE CAME HERE AND FOR ALMOST TWO AND A HALF YEARS WE LIVED IN LEAKING TENTS

WE HAD NO WOODEN FLOORS. NO GAS.

AND AT LAST, MORE OR LESS, WE HAVE GOOD CONDITIONS

WE JUST RECEIVED A NEW TENT.

WE'VE RECEIVED OVENS AND STOVES

THE SCHOOL STARTED WORKING.

AND NOW THEY WANT TO SEND PEOPLE TO OTHER PLACES BY FORCE!

I visit one of the places the Russians have promoted as an alternative to the tents—an abandoned distillery at Vozhesenovka, which now houses a few Chechen families

Esita, who agreed to leave Iman camp with her widowed daughter and grandchildren, tells me—

I HAVE NO REAL COMPLAINTS

Okay, she had to whitewash the walls herself, and there's still no gas, but—

COMPARED TO WHAT I'VE GONE THROUGH, I'M HAPPY IN THIS PLACE

A year ago, she says, after a hospital stay, "I came back and found out I had no place to live..."

"I just found a clean spot"

"No tent."

The Chechen camp authorities in Iman collaborate with the Russians. In some cases they have removed the tents of IDP's who are temporarily absent, apparently hoping they will leave the camp all together

As it was, Esita moved from one overcrowded tent to another, four times in one year. Finally she had enough, and this place—with a whole room for her self and her family—looked mighty good.

THERE IS NO ONE TO SCOLD THE CHILDREN.

I CAN COOK WHEN I WANT TO

I DON'T HAVE TO LOSE MY DIGNITY IN FRONT OF SOMEONE ELSE.

Lyuba and Aslambeck, also recent transplants from Iman, live with their children in spacious rooms nearby.

TO MY MIND, IT'S BETTER TO HAVE ROOF AND WALLS INSTEAD OF A TENT

IT WAS COLD, AND THE TENT HADN'T BEEN WINTERIZED

But, Lyuba admits, she feared they would be moved from Iman anyway

A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MIGRATION SERVICES KEPT COMING AND SAYING THE TENTS WERE TO BE REMOVED

TELL THE TRUTH

THEY THREATENED TO BRING BULL-DOZERS AND FLATTEN THAT PLACE.

IV-ZARA

Zara Inc
name of s
ries of
caused
washed in
a corner
in a jail
for a
10 years

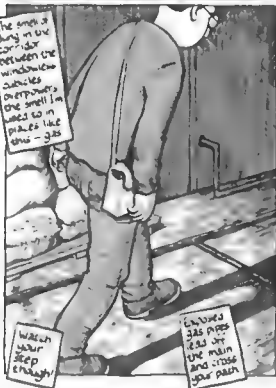


2014

usually the
top of the
back of cars
smashed - a dozen
feet from where
people live - the
houses were
thought over
from a highway
by 100's



The smell of
dung in the
corridor
between the
windmills
overpowers
the smell I'm
used to in
places like
this - gas



Watch
your
step
enough!

Explosive
gas pipes
lead off
the main
and cross
your path

Zara shows me into one of the two adjoining particle board boxes where she makes her home with her seven children. Two to a bunk, I suppose.



IF YOU
DONT OPEN
THE DOOR ITS
TOO SLUTTY

IF YOU
FIND IT YOU
LET THE SPELL
OF THE
COWS

It's stuffy all right, but as cheery as a room in a cowed can get. She's hung up carpets on the wall.

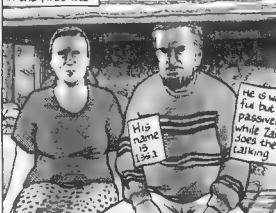


THIS PLACE IS DAMP, AND THEY MAKE IT BETTER

THEY MAKE IT COSY

Zara bought these rooms for 4,000 rubles from the previous owner, who built them himself from donated material and charged her for his labor

She's just paid another 3,000 on a room for her husband, who only escaped from Chechnya last month, and his two nephews who were orphaned in the first war



He is watchful but sits passively while Zara does the talking

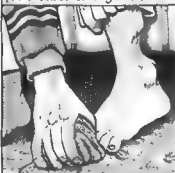
He has been tortured, she says



Detained for six months

Tortured

As if on cue, he hikes up his trouser leg. The Russians shot him, you see. He was sitting with his hands on his head and they put a bullet through his ankle



He yanks up his pullover

You see the welts?

They heated up a knife and cut him with it over and over

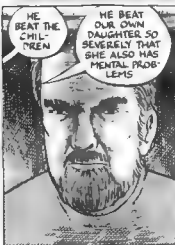
HE ALMOST WENT INSANE

HE DIDN'T RECOGNIZE HIS OWN FAMILY WHEN HE WAS RELEASED



HE BEAT THE CHILDREN

HE BEAT OUR OWN DAUGHTER SO SEVERELY THAT SHE ALSO HAS MENTAL PROBLEMS



ONCE HE TIED MY HANDS TOGETHER AND MY FEET TOGETHER AND WAS GOING TO SLAUGHTER ME WITH A KNIFE





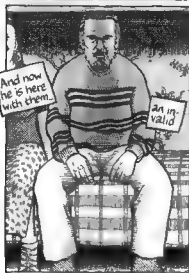
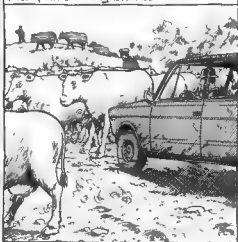
In the second war, Zara was wounded and fled Grozny with the children after their home was completely destroyed. Issa, whose passport and papers had been lost, remained behind. Without identification, he was unwilling to risk the journey to Ingushetia and another arrest by the Russians. He didn't even dare step out of his brother's house.

"Almost every week I would go to Chechnya to bring him food," Zara tells me. "I had to take him food from my family's humanitarian ration or he would have died of hunger."



"When I couldn't go for three months, I found him eating unground wheat and drinking sunflower oil."

She decided to chance getting him out. She paid a taxi driver 1,000 rubles - \$33 - to find a route around the many Russian checkpoints to Ingushetia.



But if he cannot work, and if you are responsible for him, for his two nephews, and for your seven children, how do you make ends meet?





and there's humanitarian relief, too

Relatives and a kind woman named Rausa helped when Zara didn't have a ruble to her name

Someone else gave her two mattresses and a blanket for the children

Now she works in the market, she says

but it's hard

EVERYTHING IS HARD

IF MY CHILDREN ARE SICK, I CAN'T AFFORD TO TAKE THEM TO A DOCTOR

I HAVE TO LET THEM GET OVER THEIR ILLNESS THEMSELVES

When I get up to leave, Zara lets her defenses down. She asks if there's anything I can do

NO, I DON'T WANT YOUR OWN MONEY



BUT COULD YOU ASK SOME ONE AT AN NGO TO HELP ME?



I never know what to say to someone who thinks I have connections with important officials who can tend to her special case



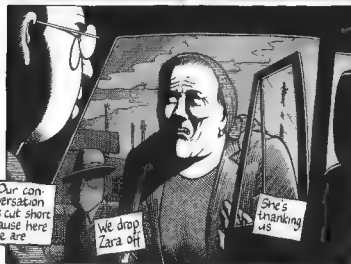
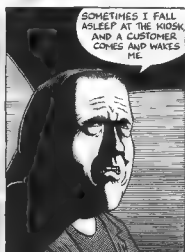
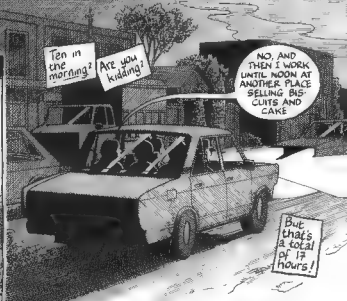
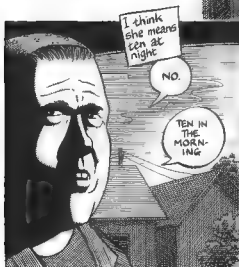
Two days later I run into Zara on her way to work

DO YOU NEED A LIFT?



WHAT HOURS DO YOU WORK

I START WORKING AT THE KIOSK AT SEVEN THIS EVENING AND I FINISH AT TEN



Y. GETTING BY

Remember Hazhan who arrived at Logovaz just two weeks ago with five kids and a bullet wound? Well like many IDPs I talk to she filed the war with nothing but the shirt on her back.

I ONLY HAVE WHAT I'M WEARING

REALLY

I'M NOT SAYING THAT TO GET SYMPATHY

She says her children don't have a change of clothes either

BUT THEN HOW DO YOU DO THEIR LAUNDRY?

"I do the washing when the children are asleep," she says. "I'm lucky I have good neighbors who give me soap and detergent."



The most important thing her new room mates have done for Hazhan is help her get on the Danish Refugee Council list

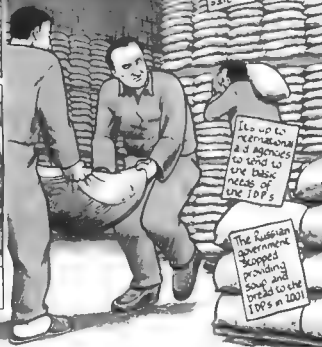
It's the one that matters most

It's ensured a basic monthly allowance - food, oil, sugar, and soiled cloth

"The other women have given me some shoes for the children."



Like most all recent Chechen arrivals, Hazhan must rely on the generosity of those who have already settled into their lives here as IDPs.



It's up to international aid agencies to tend to the basic needs of the IDPs

The Russian government stopped providing soup and bread to the IDPs in 2001

The international aid groups hand out building materials, tents, and necessities like stoves but there is never enough to go around

Hadet, who lives at the abandoned milk factory at Alkaywa, tells me -

RECENTLY AN AGENCY CAME AROUND DISTRIBUTING MATTRESSES BUT WE WERE NOT ON THE LIST AND DIDN'T GET EVEN ONE

Hadet, her husband, and their three grandchildren must share two single mattresses between them.

What about these other possessions, these pans these buckets?

THE THINGS WE HAVE ARE PRESENTS FROM OUR DAUGHTER

Hadet must supplement whatever is given out. When I meet her, she was getting ready to walk to nearby fields to collect small potatoes that Ingush farmers hadn't bothered to dig up



Most IDPs try to earn money in some way or other. Hazhan, for example, has already sold her gold rings, earrings and bracelets. One of her children now helps out by selling casseroles in the market while Hazhan washes floors.

I HAVE HIGHER EDUCATION

I WAS AN ACCOUNTANT, A TECHNICAL INSTITUTE GRADUATE

AND I'M FULL OF ENERGY

I THINK I WILL OVERCOME THIS



UNFORTUNATELY, MY HEALTH ISN'T GOOD

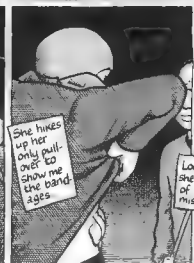
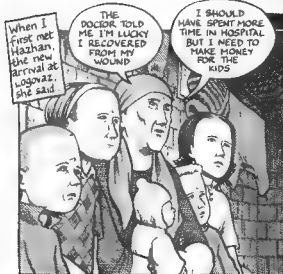


Other IDP's—widows and their children, the elderly—rely on pensions to help them get by. Unfortunately, they have to collect them in their hometowns in war-torn Chechnya.



I ask Raisa, the widow with five kids whom you've met before, if she's afraid to return to her village to pick up the family's monthly pension, which totals 3,500 rubles (\$115).







Zamani has lived here for two months. Her husband died of natural causes in Chechnya. Zamani refused to flee to Ingushetia before the mourning period ended...



"She was taken to hospital, but then the Russian troops closed the village. No one was allowed in or out for ten days."



"On the 11th day I was able to visit her."



"I told the doctor I'd come again the next day, but after I left the hospital she died."

Her other daughter Samani traveled from her home in Nagrovsky elsewhere in the Russian Federation to bring Zamani here. Samani then collected her children and moved in with her mother.

Wait!

You left your home in Nagrovsky for a cowshed?

I'M USED TO DIFFICULTIES, AND INCONVENIENCES DO NOT SCARE ME.



MY HUSBAND REMAINED BECAUSE HERE HE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO FIND A JOB.

AND HE DIDN'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN ALL THIS WAR STUFF.

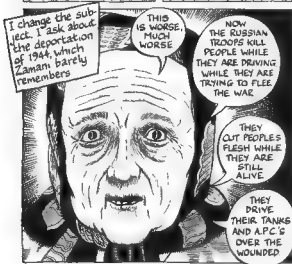


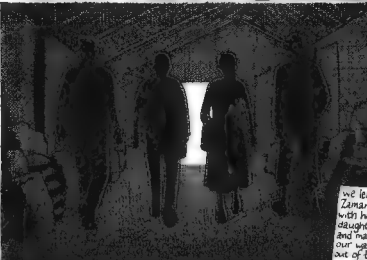
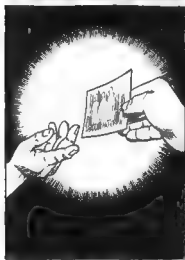
She says she's happier here among her own people where her children can be raised with Chechen values.

"I don't like the behavior of the young boys and girls in Russia. They smoke, they drink, they could kiss, and this doesn't coincide with Chechen traditions and culture."







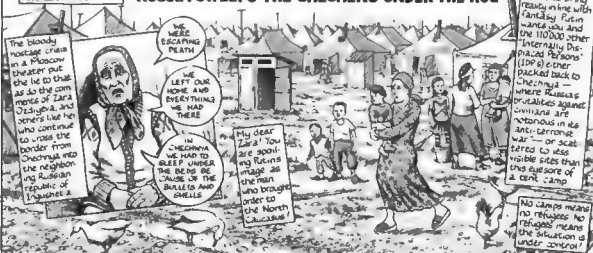


Every so often, with a straight face, Russian President Putin declares that the fight to keep Chechnya in the Russian Federation is won.

WHAT REFUGEES?

by Jim Stoen
12/20/01

RUSSIA SWEEPS THE CHECHENS UNDER THE RUG



The bloody hostage crisis in a Moscow theater put the lie to that as do the comments of Zaira Dzidzheva, and others like her who continue to cross the border from Chechnya into the neighboring Russian republic of Ingushetia.

WE WERE ESCAPING DEATH

WE LEFT OUR HOME AND EVERYTHING WE HAD THERE

IN CHECHNYA WE HAD TO SLEEP UNDER THE BEDS BECAUSE OF THE BULLETS AND SHELLS

My dear Zaira! You are spoiling Putin's image as the man who brought order to the North Caucasus!

And so to bring reality in line with fantasy, Putin wants you and the 110,000 other "Internally Displaced Persons" (IDPs) either packed back to Chechnya — where Russia's brutalities against civilians are notorious in its anti-terrorist war — or scattered to less visible sites than the eyesore of a tent camp.

No camps means no refugees. No refugees means the situation is under control!

For months the word has filtered down that the clock is ticking for the Chechens who've found sanctuary in Ingushetia.



A 20-step plan signed in May by Ingush and pro-Russian Chechen representatives under Russian helpful direction, states plainly that the camps are to be removed and the IDPs sent back to Chechnya.

Heron Elzhurkayev, the commandant of a small refugee settlement in an abandoned chicken farm, describes a heated meeting between camp leaders and a Chechen politician who owed his allegiance to Moscow.



WE TRIED TO THREATEN US SAYING IF WE THINK THERE WON'T BE "CLEANSING" OPERATIONS HERE, WE ARE WRONG

And in a tent camp called Iman an IDP named Tamara relates the threat made during a personal visit by Russia's First Deputy Head of Migration Services in September.



THEY SAID THEY WOULD BRING BULLDOZERS AND TRACTORS TO SMASH ALL THE TENTS

They didn't use force then, but are they about to use it now? Russian troops have surrounded the biggest tent camps in a move residents fear precedes forcible repatriation



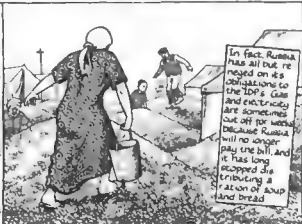
Off-centre the Russian position is so that IDPs will only be moved 'voluntarily'

But this fellow, Islam, a resident of Iman isn't buying it. Ask him what 'voluntary' means. Other Chechen IDPs' collaborators with the Russians alerted off his tent while the rest of his family was away. He couldn't resist those goons, alone he says.



And in this way the IDPs are encouraged to voluntarily go back to Chechnya or move to the abandoned Ingush factories the Russians claim are better than Imam camp. But Islam would rather live in this mud-brick room he's building.

Meanwhile what is going on at Bart camp? Every day a truck comes and dumps gravel right where the IDPs live. The truck belongs to an Ingush company that leased the land to the Russian authorities to provide space for the spill-over of IDPs from Bart. But it seems the Russians haven't been paying the rent, according to Mirvetta Bokova, the camp's deputy commandant and the company wants its land back.



In fact, Russia has all but reneged on its obligations to the IDPs. Gas and electricity are sometimes cut off for weeks. Because Russia will no longer pay the bill, and it has long stopped distributing a ration of soup and bread.

Four hundred people could be displaced here in Bart. But does that matter to Russia?

To hell with Rosa! whose tent is about to be swallowed up by the gravel!

THEY DON'T EVEN TELL THE IDPS TO GO OUT. THEY JUST DUMP THE GRAVEL.



But don't you get the message Rosa? There is only one way to walk and that is back to Chechnya. Help your president Mr Putin declare victory—again!

"Chechen War, Chechen Women" was included in a series of books packaged together under the title *I Live Here* to benefit Amnesty International. The immensely good-hearted actress Mia Kirshner had assembled a diverse group of writers, artists, photographers, and designers to tackle human rights issues around the world that were receiving little attention at the time. She asked me to accompany her to Ingushetia to meet refugees from the war in neighboring Chechnya, and she paid for my flights, my accommodations, and our bodyguards. Bodyguards were a requirement for foreigners traveling in the area (to discourage kidnapping) and were probably there to

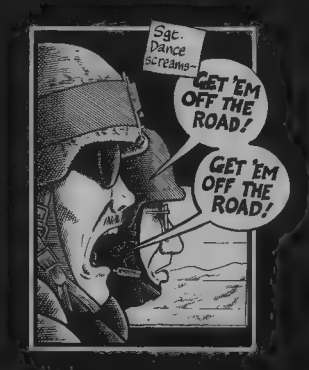
report our movements to the authorities as well. We had three bodyguards each, and this amused me to no end. ("I'm sitting around with three personal bodyguards, sneering at journalists who've only hired two," I wrote in my journal.) But the entourage of bodyguards seemed to upset some of the traumatized Ingush refugees we approached, as I detail at the beginning of the story. I took to bringing only the most easygoing bodyguard with me into the camps and insisting the others wait in the car. Among the people who truly need protection in the Caucasus are the courageous staff members of Memorial, a local human rights organization, without whose help Mia and I could not have

done our work. Memorial personnel have become targets of those who do not appreciate the exposure of ongoing human rights violations in the post-Soviet nations.

"What Refugees?" is an editorial, and it is perhaps the only occasion in which I tried to respond to a real-time situation immediately. It was completed for the *Boston Globe's* Ideas section for deputy editor Jenny Schuessler within a few weeks of my leaving Ingushetia.

"Chechen War, Chechen Women" appeared in *I Live Here*, published by Pantheon Books, 2008

"What Refugees?" appeared in the *Boston Globe*, November 17, 2002



IRAQ

COMPLACENCY KILLS

By Joe
Gibson

"When I'm on the road," says Sgt. Dance, commander of Mobile Assault Platoon (MAP), explaining his policy toward Iraqi drivers here "you're not on the road."

And so as we race to check on a report of some vehicles linking up in the middle of nowhere, the oncoming traffic had better get out of the way!

Lance Cpl. Janiga, binoculars pressed to his face, yells—

SINGLE!

—and Lance Cpl. Battles, the driver, flashes his lights until the startled Iraqi swerves off the road.

A single Iraqi in a car finds their profile of a suicide bomber, and our Humvee barely whizzes by that potential threat when two more cars come flying our way from under a bridge.

There's no time for Lance Cpl. Janiga to adjust his binoculars or for Lance Cpl. Battles to flash his lights.

Sgt. Dance screams—

GET 'EM OFF THE ROAD!

GET 'EM OFF THE ROAD!

—and Lance Cpl. Clark fires a burst across the front of the first car.

Both vehicles veer to a stop, and I catch a glimpse of a man with a mustache as we punch by.



A few minutes later we reach the suspicious group of cars, which turns out to be a funeral procession.

The bad guys don't usually congregate in the vehicles on the side of the road, says Sgt. Dance, who was skeptical all along. It's painfully obvious.

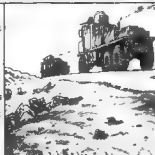
And to the bereaved he adds:

OUR SYMPATHIES ARE WITH YOU.

The primary mission of Sgt. Dance and the MAPs of the Weapons Company of the 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment is to keep the roads between Haditha and Hic open to U.S. convoys.



Their adversaries are insurgents whose chief weapons are roadside and vehicle-borne bombs and land mines. Twisted bits of car metal, charred patches of ground, and craters attest to the violence they've dished out to the Americans.



The Marines of the 1/23, who are nearly all Texan reservists, run most of their road patrols in this stretch of western Iraq, from the functioning ten-story high Haditha Dam on the Euphrates River.



The stairwells reek of sulfur, but the Marines are otherwise smothered in home comforts. They enjoy a well-equipped weight room.



football on the chow hall's big-screen TV, and 24-hour internet connections to their wives and mothers.

I'm bunking on the fifth deck in a room full of officers where Lt. Crabtree, the battalion adjutant, projects a movie on the wall every night and dispenses snacks from an endless supply of pooled care packages.



The room's coffee aficionado is the commander of the engineering platoon, Capt. Kunholm, and once I ask what motivated a married, liberal, business-owning Ph.D. student like himself to join the reserves knowing full well he would be sent to Iraq, a sense of duty, he answers.



Also—YOU SHOULDN'T DISCOUNT THE SPIRIT OF WHITE, UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS ADVENTURISM.

Almost discordantly in this cocooned world of X-Boxes and Maxim magazines, a sign on the second deck reminds the Marines of the MAPs heading down to their hammocks that—







Sgt. Johnson creeps toward the road, keeping the Iraqi in his sights.

He wants a better view of what the driver is doing.

I take a look at the driver myself.

HE'S PRAYING.

Granted, he seems to be praying unusually fast.

Is the praying a ruse?

HE WAS LOOKING AROUND LIKE HE WAS SCOPING OUT THE AREA.



Minutes later the driver leaves but Cpl. Chengs still suspicious.

The orange bag could have been a prayer mat, he agrees.

-BUT I HAVEN'T SEEN TOO MANY PEOPLE GETTING OUT OF THEIR CARS TO PRAY.

MAYBE HE WAS CHECKING OUR REACTION, SEEING HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE FOR THE HUMVEES TO GET OVER HERE.



MAYBE I'M OVERANALYZING.

And so ends another frustrating episode for the Marines of MAF 2, who would like nothing better than to capture or kill an insurgent in the act of planting a bomb.



One of their platoon mates, Cpl. Kolda was killed four weeks ago when an abandoned car he was investigating blew up.

He was overwatched in this open-bus humvee called a highback, commanded by Sgt. Cantu.

I'D LIKE TO THINK HE DIED RIGHT AWAY.

THAT WOULD MAKE ME FEEL BETTER.

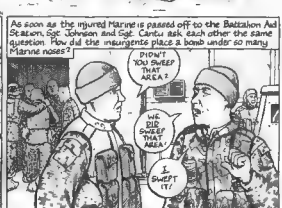
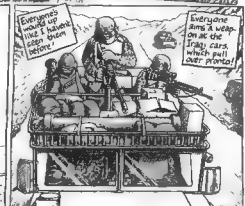
WE GAVE HIM CPR, BUT I THINK HE WAS ALREADY GONE.



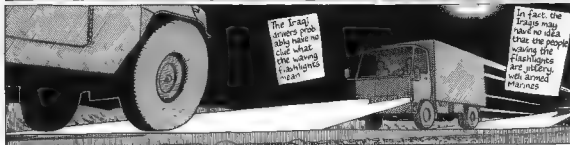
Two of Sgt. Cantu's crew bear the effects of near misses by suicide bombers.

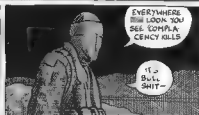
Lance Cpl. Ledesma is slowly regaining his hearing after one blast.

driver Cpl. Heredia's ear was scarred by another.



MAP 2 returns to the desert to complete its watch. As night falls, Sgt. Cartel's crew is tensed up, and soon there is word of a car stopped nearby.

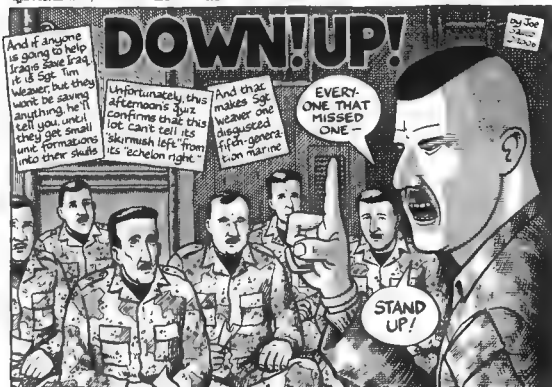




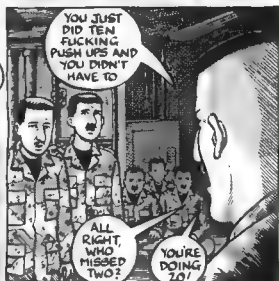
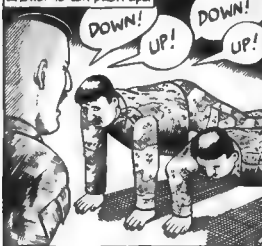
December 2004. On the Euphrates River, in Iraq's volatile Anbar province, on one of the top levels of the Haditha Dam, isolated from the reserve marines of the 1st Battalion of the 23rd Regiment, which is head-quartered here, two U.S.



servicemen are tasked with shaping a motley group from the Iraqi National Guard (I.N.G.) into the sort of self-motivated, competent soldiers that can—in the words of President George W. Bush—"stand up" so that "we can stand down."



Sgt. Weaver's prescription for one wrong answer is ten push ups.



Ahmed, the interpreter, translates, and

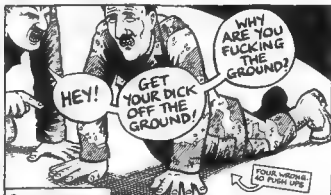


DOWN!
UP! DOWN!
UP!

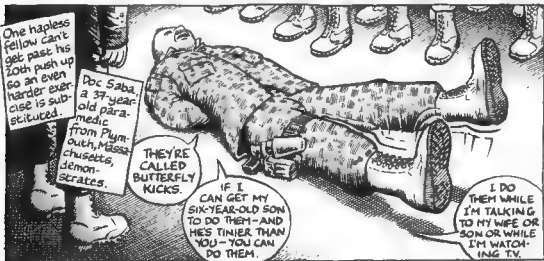
GET
OFF
YOUR
KNEES!

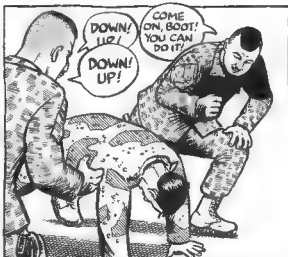


Sgt. Weaver and his Navy colleague, Petty Officer 2nd Class Scott "Doc" Saba, have just three weeks to whip these guys into shape before they'll be expected to accompany and assist marines on patrol, and so the Iraqis had better learn a few basic commands—in English—cause any mistake out there and a bunch of friendly are gonna get killed.



Sgt. Weaver, 28, a heavy equipment service manager in his civilian life in Crosby, Texas, can't believe these guys. They'd gone over the formations "with little army men" again and again.



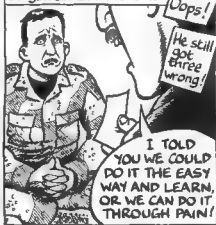




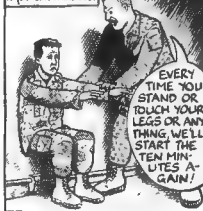
While the men go over the answers to the quiz, Sgt. Weaver steps over to where I've been sitting talking notes.



It's time to check the make-up test of the guardsman who cheated



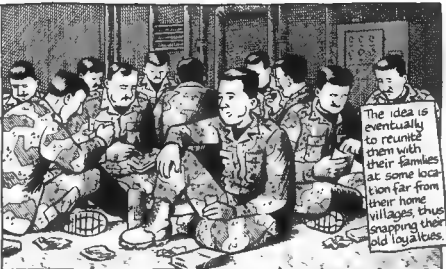
Sgt. Weaver orders the fellow into a stress position and tells him to hold it for ten minutes.



Before too long, the guardsman squirms upright and drops his arms. He's made to start again. Minutes later he's babbling.



In fact, none of these men, who were already in the I.N.G., knew they were in for this Marine boot camp stuff. One day they were locked in a room and the next they were in vehicles heading for Haditha Dam for security reasons they were not told where they were going; their loved ones still do not know they are here.

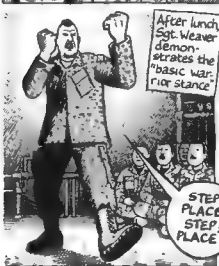


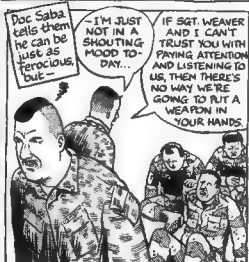
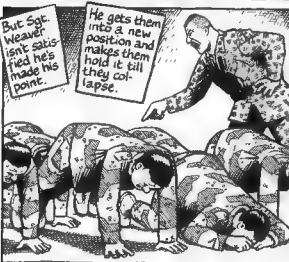
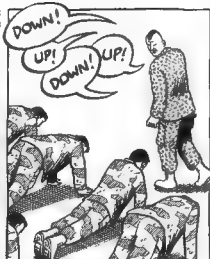
After their three-week course, Doc Saba tells me they'll have a graduation ceremony where awards will be given to the best and the most-improved trainee

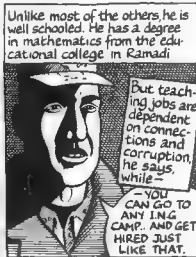
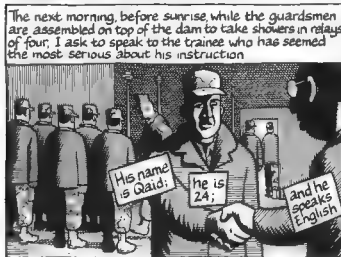
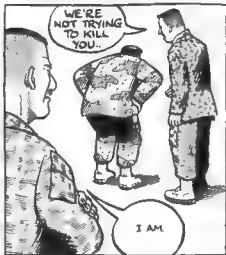
WE'RE GETTING A PATCH DESIGNED FOR THEM, SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF



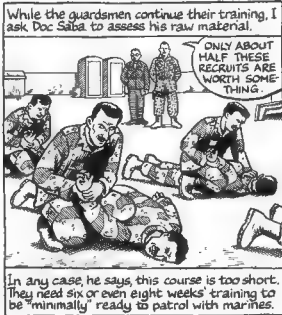
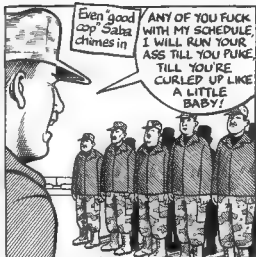
Doc Saba, who was attached to the scout snipers, and Sgt Weaver, who was pulled from the battalion's motor transport unit, put this program together in just two weeks.











Soon they'll be put on the firing range to test their proficiency on the A.K.47.

They'll be given only six rounds each, just in case—

Well, just in case they're bad guys bent on a killing spree.

AS FAR AS TRUST, WE DON'T KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THESE GUYS. IT NEVER FAILS THAT THE MUJAHADEEN PUT INSURGENTS AND SPIES AMONG THE RECRUITS.



Meanwhile, Sgt. Weaver has caught two Iraqis smoking cigarette butts and fibbing about where they got 'em.

YOU LIE TO ME AND I'LL SHOOT YOU!



And maybe he will, too!

He's drawn his pistol and loaded a clip!



I WILL SHOOT YOU IF YOU LIE TO ME ON PATROL!

YOUR LIES MIGHT COST MARINE LIVES!



After that drama ends without casualties, Sgt. Weaver lines up the guardsmen to test them individually on their hand-to-hand skills.



He barks out the maneuver he wants to see.

STRONG-SIDE WRIST LOCK!

Few of the Iraqis get the moves right.

I TOLD YOU TO FUCKING PAY ATTENTION!

YOU DIDN'T DO IT!



Sgt. Weaver starts throwing the guys who get the moves wrong.



One of the younger trainees can't do a "leg sweep"...



so Sgt. Weaver does one for him.



MY HEAD!
MY HEAD!



YOU'RE CRYING LIKE A FUCKING BABY!

YOU'RE A GROWN MAN, NOT A LITTLE BOY!

Doc Saba steps in. He thinks the fellow might actually be hurt.



HE'S PROBABLY NEVER BEEN IN A FIGHT IN HIS LIFE



By the way, everyone's shivering in the crisp December air.

ARE YOU ALL FUCKING COLD?

ON YOUR FACE!

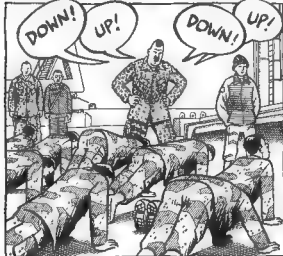


DOWN!

UP!

DOWN!

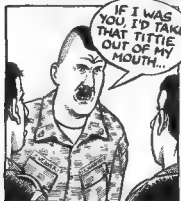
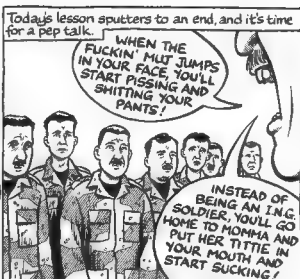
UP!



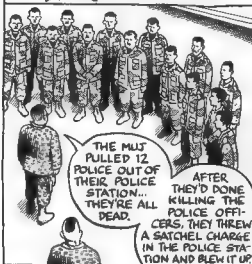
A few minutes later, Sgt. Weaver is at wit's end. Only two of the 14 guardsmen perform the hand-to-hand drill to his satisfaction.

ALL RIGHT, DOC I'M DONE.

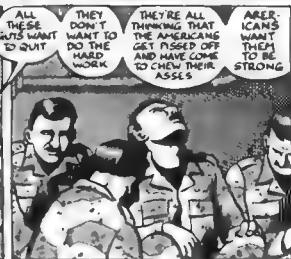
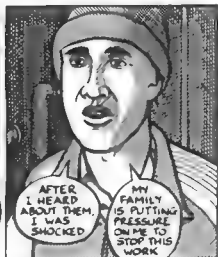
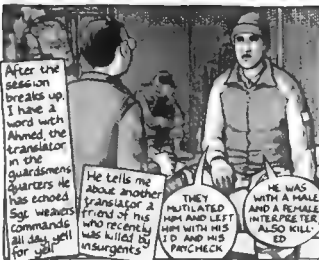




Doc Saba lets them know about a group of Iraqi police just executed in Tikrit.



He tells them they'll be expected to encourage others to join the I.N.G. Then



I spend a little time with a few guardsmen who are willing to talk to me.



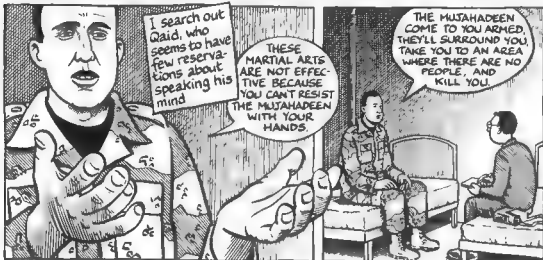
They say they are proud to be guardsmen...

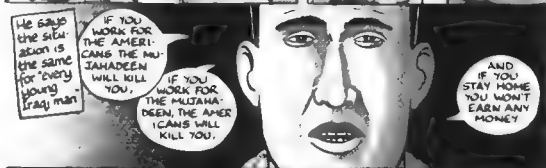
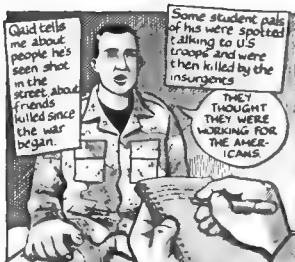
that they want to fight the insurgents...

and that they think the training they're undergoing is good



I wonder if they are telling me what they think I want to hear. I wonder if they think I am going to report what they say to Sgt. Weaver or Petty Officer Second Class Saba.







TRAUMA ON LOAN

Thaine Saboti and Sherzad Khazid have other things to worry about besides one last interview tomorrow they are supposed to fly back to Iraq through Dubai and their trans it visas haven't come through

I 'JUST CONFESS'

By Joe Sacco



So with some reluctance, but graciously, they turn back the clock to that afternoon in July 2003 when they sat together in Thaine's office in Baghdad and heard the unmistakable squeaking of US armored vehicles approaching

What followed still bewilders them



According to the two men, American troops then entered the building "from all sides," mihluding from the roof.



Sherzad: "They were yelling and aiming their guns. And they started beating everybody."

Along with others in the building they were cuffed, hooded and driven away. It was nighttime when the vehicle stopped. They kicked us off, according to Thane.



We fell on the ground. Our hands were still tied behind our backs, and we were all hooded.

Thane's left shoulder was dislocated in the fall.

When their hoods were removed, they say they found themselves in one of Saddam Hussein's presidential palaces—standing in front of a cage of lions. The lions, evidently, once had been the personal property of Uday, one of Saddam's notorious sons.



One by one, the detainees were taken to the cage and according to Sherzad, told to confess.



WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO CONFESS?

YOU DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE? JUST CONFESS!

Thane: "They opened the door. We went in maybe a meter."



"But when the lions came running toward us, they pulled us outside."



"I lost consciousness. I was unconscious most of the time now. And the way they woke me up was by beating me."



The men then were taken to a wall behind the cage.

THE OFFICER WAS DEPARED TO EXECUTE YOU BY SHOOTING SO YOU BETTER CONFESS.

Sherzad: "And we didn't confess because we didn't know what they wanted us to say."



"YOU KNOW WHEN YOU WATCH MOVIES AND YOU HEAR THE WORD FIRE"

"IT WAS THE SAME"

"THEY SAID FIRE AND THEY FIRE"

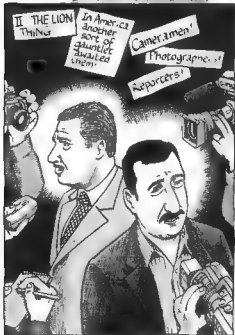


"I fell down to the ground. And then I heard the soldiers' laughter. So I started looking at my body, trying to find a trace of blood. I realized it was just a mock execution."



According to Thane and Sherzad, by then a number of detainees had pissed on themselves.

They spent the night shackled to a tennis court fence, and the next day they were taken to the prison at Baghdad's international airport, where they were made to run a gauntlet of baton-wielding soldiers before reaching their cells.



II THE LION THING

In America another sort of gauntlet awaited them

Cameras men Photographers Reporters



By the time I met them in Washington, D.C., their lawyers, who include members of the American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights First, fretted that all the interviews had pushed their clients to the edge.

SOME TIMES WE DON'T KNOW WHEN THEY'VE HAD ENOUGH AND SOME TIMES THEY DON'T KNOW THEMSELVES UNTIL AFTER WARDS

Thane and Sherzad's visit to the States is meant to draw attention to their legal complaints, which alleges "torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment" while they were in U.S. military custody.

They "are representative of so many hundreds or thousands of others whose shockingly brutal mistreatment" is ultimately Mr. Rumsfeld's responsibility, according to Emily Whitfield, the ACLU's media relations director.



In effect, Thane and Sherzad are standing in for all the hooded and beaten. For this case they are sacrificial detainees.

* THEY ARE JEWELRY BY SIX OTHER FLIGHTS TO FOUR AIRCRAFT AND TWO BARRIS

© 2002 TIME

So when their lawyers expressed misgivings about Thane and Sherzad reopening their wounds for one last journalist - me! - when they hinted my interview might be cancelled, I wanted to snap back -



Yes, it's 'the lion thing' that is raising eyebrows. Much else of what Thane and Sherzad allege - the shackling in extreme temperatures, the electric shocks, the desecration of the Koran - might seem no-hum to an American public that has long digested the enormities of Abu Ghraib.



And at his press conference Mr Rumsfeld called Thane and Sherzad's lion story 'fabricated' and referred to Al Qaeda documents that -



Besides, the media blitz has had an impact. Even the chief defendant has taken notice.



Thane and Sherzad might take exception to Mr Rumsfeld's implication that they have studied Al-Qaeda manuals or that they are 'terrorists'.



III. WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE SPORT?



But the first question was -



I laughed and he hit me

After perfunctory questions about weapons of mass destruction, Al Qaeda, etc, the interrogator asked -



But then does Sherzad know why he was subjected to [simulated] anal rape with a water bottle? Does Thane know why 'one or more soldiers in the presence of male and female soldiers inserted their fingers' into his anus?



I've quoted Thane and Sherzad's sexual assault allegations from the lawsuit. Their attorneys ask me not to bring up the subject with the men. When CNN broke that ground rule and badgered Thane about his ordeal, he was retraumatized, I'm told.

* SADDAM IS THE ONLY MAN BOTTLED IN HAVING BEEN THIS INTERROGATION DONE PLACE

IV. 'I HAVE NO DESIRE TO TELL A SAD STORY'

In the morning, an interview with Time magazine, in the afternoon, a meeting with earnest Senate staffers who promise to relay Thaine and Sherzad's story to their bosses.

And now one of the all-star news suspects a black jet together with her colleagues in an office nearby.

IT'S UP TO YOU

But Thaine is only being diplomatic. He boards the van rented for the day's activities and waits for his handlers to arrive.

WE WANT TO GO SEE THE WHITE HOUSE

The lawyers are sensitive to the moods of their clients. The rest of the day will be given over to sight-seeing.

For an hour or two, Thaine and Sherzad stand in front of America's monuments to liberty.

But the cell phones are ringing again.

A senator has agreed to meet with Thaine and Sherzad personally.

When!

Now!

Thaine is almost second-hand.

He has to remind himself why he's here.

WE DIDN'T COME AS TOURISTS

Sherzad on the other hand won't have

AFTER SEEING THIS BEAUTIFUL VIEW I HAVE NO DESIRE TO TELL A SAD STORY

The attorneys turn down the senator. And they tell Thaine and Sherzad they will get to see the White House in the morning.

V. THE AIRPORT

AT THE AIRPORT THERE WERE 95 TO 100 RETAINABLES IN A MOUNTAIN TENT.

There was a place for people to sit but not to sleep. The ground was earth but we were given one blanket. My pillow was my shirt.

I had a beard. I had long hair just like a beast.

"Each tent had its own guard...The guard would bring a folding chair, and held sit with his water, and he had a carton of cigarettes, and he smoked as much as he wanted"



"We were allowed two cigarettes a day"

"One time, a very ugly person came."



"I'M NOT GOING TO GIVE YOU YOUR CIGARETTES"



"I'M GOING TO THROW A CIGARETTE, AND IF YOU CATCH IT IN YOUR MOUTH YOU CAN HAVE IT"

"IF IT FALLS ON THE GROUND, YOU DON'T GET IT"

"The soldiers saw this funny situation, and they were coming over"



"One of the detainees was in front, and his actions were like a dog's"



"The soldier was faking as if he would throw the cigarette this way or that way"



"The soldiers were laughing. They gave him a lot of cigarettes"



"It was my turn. I told him in very basic English:"



"I WANT TWO CIGARETTES ONLY PLEASE"

"I DON'T WANT TO DO THAT"

"He opened the wire and came in. He beat me and he cursed me."



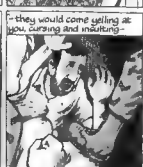
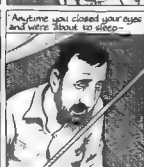
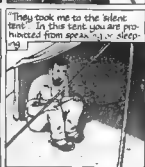
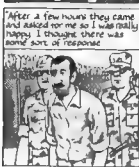
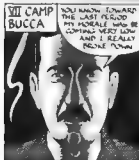
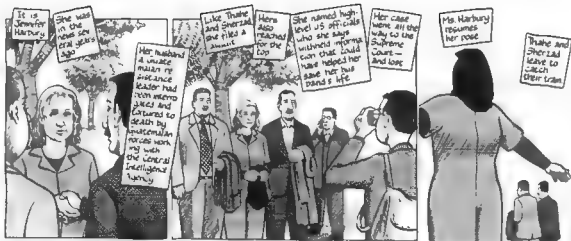
VI. THE WHITE HOUSE

"There's a train to catch back to New York, but a promise is a promise, and in the morning Thaine and Sherzad are taken to see the White House"



"And there they find a one protester in a painful familiar pose"





VIII RELEASE

Honestly
I've been
gentle

I haven't
Pushed

I've jumped
over whole
allegations
and a beat
ings and
humiliations

I've used
my energy
to wait for
release

Yet even
without
the hints
from the
security
monitoring
our corner
action it's
clear to me
that there
has had
enough

CON-
TINUE WITH
ME BECAUSE
I'M STRONGER
THAN HE
IS

So I go on
with Sher
and for a
few minutes
more but I
know it's
time to leave

Described after
being, it was
then situations
a journalist in
a room begins
to smile even
he notices

Still - I
have one
more ques-
tion just
one more
and I'm
going

How will
it be?

YOU
KNOW, THE
RELEASE IS
RANDOM JUST
LIKE THE
ARREST

Once you're released, you don't believe it: You
look behind you because you're so scared that
they're going to jump you and arrest you again



And I did not believe that I was released until I
arrived at my house and saw my children



And I closed the door



And I asked my brother
to bring me a lock so
I could lock the door
from the inside

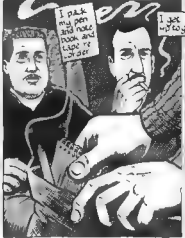


And they were laugh-
ing at me



I pack
my pen
and note
book and
tape re-
corder

I get
it to go



I tell Thabe
and Sheraz
that I was
honored to
meet them


I thank
them

I wish
they a
good
journey
back to
home



And once
again
they are
released





I've heard much criticism of embedded journalism, including by people whose opinions I respect, and though I was personally opposed to the invasion of Iraq, I thought it would be worth my while to see things from the standpoint of those at the tip of the spear of the American imperial project. Of course a journalist begins to see things from the perspective of a marine when one is on patrol with marines, but to me that is the point. Ultimately combat troops are narrowly focused on the matter at hand, and generally they are more interested in taking care of each other than accomplishing anything more patriotic sounding. In that respect, almost all combat stories are the same, and I imagine "Complacency Kills" could just as well have been set during the wars in Vietnam or Korea. From that perspective, I don't think my story added anything new to the immense literature of "men at war," but what journalist doesn't want to see everything firsthand? The *Guardian* staff provided me

with generous logistical support and didn't interfere editorially at all; the marines treated me with respect and kindness. I thank them all.

"Down! Up!" is a better story because it gets to the heart of the above-mentioned imperial project: the disconnect between what the results-oriented American overseers want and what the bewildered and traumatized locals are able or willing to do. Aside from a translator or two, the national guardsmen were the only Iraqis I spoke to while I was in the country. To me, they were civilians who needed a livelihood who had put on a uniform; I felt deeply sorry for them. I wrote the story as it played out in front of me. I was wary of working again for *Harper's*, but Roger Hodge, the new editor, made my second experience with the magazine a positive one.

Reporting for "Trauma on Loan," the story of Thahe Sabbar and Sherzad Khalid, was a very frustrating experience.

I spent two or three days traveling with them to let them get comfortable with me before our formal interview. Consequently, when one of them told me he was going to tell me something he hadn't told other journalists, I thought I'd earned his confidence. The human rights attorney present immediately stopped him. She obviously had his interests in mind, but I resented the interference. Even when advocates and journalists share the same values they might not necessarily have the same goals. A journalist wants to know everything and insists on his own discrimination whether and how to present loaded material.

"Complacency Kills" appeared in the *Guardian Weekend*, February 26, 2005.

"Down! Up!" appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, April 2007

"Trauma on Loan" appeared in the *Guardian Weekend*, January 21, 2006.



MIGRATION



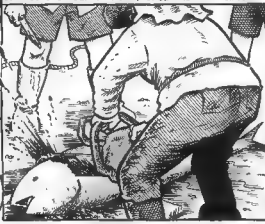
But here, off the coast of Malta, the fishermen harpooning and gutting the day's quota bristle at the mention of a darker feather in globalization's cap, the 12,500 mostly Sub-Saharan Africans desperate to reach Europe who have washed up on the island's shore.*

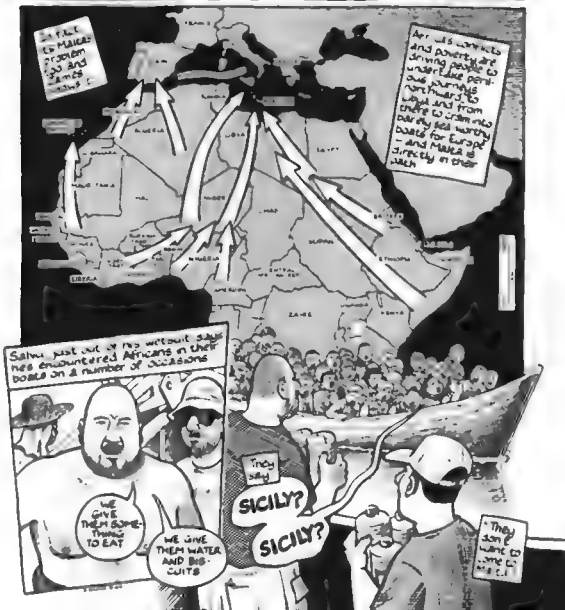
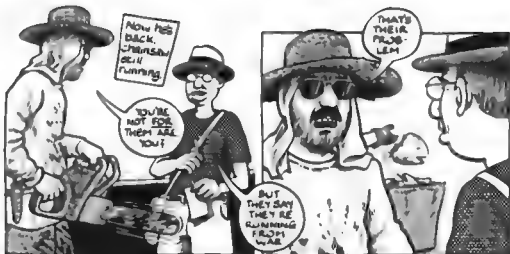


Italy once owned Somalia, James reasons



Actually, it was the French, but I don't have time to correct James before he's bounded across the deck to decapitate another tuna





And the Maltese don't particularly want them to reach Malta, either.

In one notorious incident, African migrants held on to a tuna net for two days after their boat sank while the Maltese fishermen towing the net refused to take them onboard.

Nor would they take them ashore.

The owner of the Maltese vessel didn't want to delay bringing in his catch.

It was left to the Italian navy to rescue the migrants

But the Maltese cannot always avoid the issue, and they have become the unhappy hosts of many of those rescued at sea or desperate after losing their way, for any shore

IT'S NOT THAT THE MALTESE DON'T WANT TO HELP

BUT WE'RE TOO SMALL FOR THE NUMBER WE HAVE

WHERE ARE THEY GOING TO STAY?

IMAGINE IF THEY KEEP COMING

The Maltese archipelago is indeed tiny, a total of 122 square miles

In 2001, looking ahead to a potential influx of what are now termed "irregular immigrants," Malta opened a facility to hold 80 people

and with 400,000 residents it is one of the world's most densely populated places



ONLY SITES MENTIONED IN THIS STORY ARE LABELED



The next year 1600 Africans landed

The numbers kept rising



There is a story going around that has gained traction in Malta. I heard it four times.



An African tells a Maltese policeman, "Keep the boats because one day you'll be on them."

THE MAYOR

Time for me to come clean:

I was born in Malta.

My family immigrated to Australia when I was a baby.

and the Australian government eager to populate its large continent with white-faced Europeans, paid most of our passage.



But no one sent the Africans — the vast majority of whom are single Muslim men — an invitation to Malta, a Catholic and, until recently, homogeneous country.

When African immigrants arrive here, they are welcomed by detention for up to a year and a half (we'll get to that later) before being released to open centers, where they can come and go as they please.

Some of these facilities are in the heart of Maltese communities.

One of the largest is in a disused trade school in Marsa, a working-class town of 6,000.



It's five-time mayor Francis Debono, describes Marsa as a "quiet place" without tension before the government unilaterally decided to put an open center here.

I REACTED NEGATIVELY BECAUSE THERE WAS NO CONSULTATION WITH THE [TOWN] COUNCIL OR THE RESIDENTS.

He drives me by the Marsa Open Center one evening.

It's a social hub for Africans from all over the island, and though its official population is about 700, he estimates that up to 2,500 flop here at times.

WHEN YOU COME TO THIS AREA, YOU FORGET YOU ARE IN MALTA.

Can I imagine a woman passing this way? he asks.

At a nearby park, Debono shows me the empty beer cans and other litter he says the immigrants leave behind.

They get drunk and fight amongst themselves, he says, and the Maltese community isn't used to such behavior.

He motions to a group of African men drinking under a bridge.

IF THEY HAVE TO GO TO THE TOILET, THEY JUST DO IT, EVEN IN FRONT OF THE CHILDREN

Debono takes me to Prince Albert Street, where a row of houses is sandwiched between the open center and Marsa's industrial zone

We pull over to speak to some people sitting on their stoop.

When Debono explains in Maltese that I've come from America to find out what the locals think of the African immigrants, one woman named Rita asks him,

WHAT SHOULD WE SAY?

THAT WE'RE FOR THEM OR AGAINST THEM?

She laughs when she realizes I understand the language, but then she gets right to it...

YESTERDAY ONE OF THEM — ABOUT 12 A.M., WHEN MY 11-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW WAS SITTING ON THE SOFA PLAYING WITH THE COMPUTER — ONE OF THEM OPENED THE DOOR AND WALKED IN.

Her sister chased off the man, Rita says.

Victor has a message for the immigrants.

AT LEAST TURN YOUR BACK WHEN YOU PEE

Manuel drives a bus, and so many blacks use it, he says, that the Maltese won't get on board.

He says one bus driver was beaten by Africans when he told them the bus was already full up.

IT'S LIKE YOU'RE SPEAKING TO AN ANIMAL.

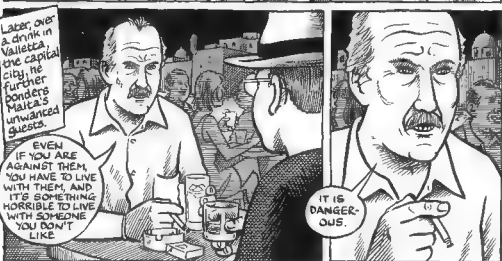
EVEN AN ANIMAL UNDERSTANDS "FULL UP."



Debono explains that Marsa is a community where "everyone trusts each other," and it has become unnerved by the great number of constantly "changing faces" in the open center. But crime hasn't increased, he says, so he tries to calm the fears of his constituents.



He himself is reconciled to the presence of the open center in Marsa, if not its size



I'M AGAINST THESE [PEOPLE] COMING OVER... BECAUSE I'M SEEING THEY WILL ONE DAY BE INFLUENTIAL IN MALTA AND IT WILL HAPPEN AS ELSEWHERE, IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM, WHERE THEY CAUSE TROUBLE, SMASHING CARS.



I DON'T REALLY HAVE ANYTHING AGAINST THEM. I'M CAPABLE OF EMPATHIZING WITH THEM. I UNDERSTAND IT'S AN ISSUE FOR MALTA, BUT I THINK IT'S AN EXAGGERATED THREAT.



JUST LOOK WHAT THEY DID IN OTHER COUNTRIES... LOOK AT THE AMERICAN PRISONS. EIGHTY OR 90 PERCENT [OF THE INMATES] ARE NEGROES. IT'S A FACT. [I'M] NOT JUDGING THEM



BRUCE 900

No man in Malta strikes the anti-immigrant chord as ruthlessly as the self-styled "racist" visionary Norman Lowell, who is serving a two-year suspended sentence for hate speech.

THE VISIONARY

WE'LL BOOT THEM OUT, OF COURSE.

VERY VERY SIMPLE OPERATION.

WE JUST DUMP THEM INTO QUARRIES.. [UNDER] THE BLISTERING SUN THERE, THE PELTING RAIN, AND JUST DROP BREAD AND WATER TO THEM.

WITHIN SIX WEEKS THEY'LL BE CRYING TO BE SENT BACK

While most Maltese roll their eyes—or gasp—when I bring up Lowell's name, his withering attacks on the African influx resonate with many, even those not willing to swallow his brand of extremism whole.



In fact, Lowell's wider world view, which blames the Jews for most of the world's ills (including the African migrations), holds up Hitler as "The Hero," and envisions a Latin-speaking, all-white empire (Imperium Europa), is generally unknown to the Maltese, few of whom have read his incendiary books.



Lowell received 4,500 Maltese votes in the 2009 European Parliament elections, triple his tally in a previous contest.

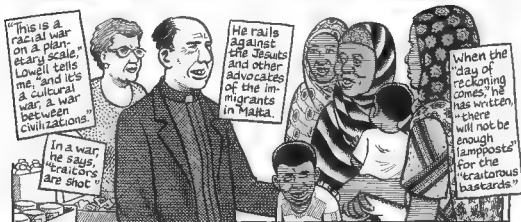
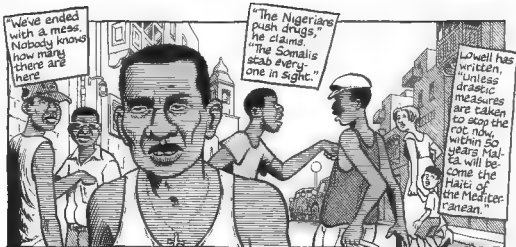
That would be a significant number in a Maltese general election, which are often decided by a few thousand votes.

Though many dismiss Lowell's showing as a protest vote, his and other right-wing voices have induced many mainstream politicians to assert their own anti-immigrant credentials. The African arrivals are now Malta's number one political issue.

At a cafe near St. Anton Gardens, on a scorchingly hot day that saw the landing of 44 more Africans on Malta, Lowell describes the rise of his Imperium Europa movement.

AT FIRST WE...WERE DENIGRATED, LAUGHED AT, IGNORED, TREATED VERY BADLY BY THE MEDIA, BUT EVENTUALLY WE MANAGED TO RAISE A CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE PEOPLE.

EVERY BOATLOAD LIKE THE ONE THAT LANDED THIS MORNING IS AN ALARM BELL TO THE PEOPLE.



But some one has taken the extreme right's message to heart

Arsonists have targeted the homes or property of those considered sympathetic to the immigrants, including journalists, Jesuits, and a lawyer.

Our interview concluded, Lowell and I walk through the gardens, where he spots a black man with three children

DO YOU SEE?

THEY ARE BREEDING FURIOUSLY IN OUR MIDST.

IT'S THE SUPPLANTING OF OUR POPULATION BY AN INVADING ALIEN ONE.

BREEDING FURIOUSLY!

THEY CUSS YOU IN THEIR LANGUAGE WHEN YOU PASS. MOST OF THE WOMEN THEY COVER THEIR NOSE

MALTESE PEOPLE ARE RACIST. THE MALTESE BELIEVE IF YOU'RE AN AFRICAN IMMIGRANT, YOU ARE NOT SCHOOLED AT ALL. THEY LOOK DOWN ON YOU

I BELIEVE IF THERE WOULD BE MORE IMMIGRANTS THEY WOULD STOP [THEIR ABUSE], BECAUSE IF WE HAVE MORE NUMBERS, WE WILL TAKE ACTIONS.

THERE IS NO CONNECTION BETWEEN MALTESE AND AFRICANS. IF YOU MEET THEM, SOME RESPECT YOU. MOST, THEY INSULT YOU.

CLEMENT

TEMITOPE

YUSEF

ABDULLAH

THE ERITREAN

He will not give me his name

He says his family would be at risk if his identity were revealed.

I tell him to make up a name for me, anything. "John," if he likes

OKAY

"JOHN."

John would certainly be in danger back in his homeland. In 2002 Malta forcibly returned more than 220 Eritreans; they were immediately imprisoned on their arrival. Many were tortured, and some died from their mistreatment.

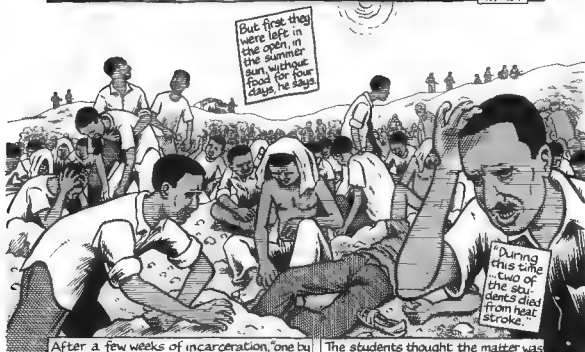


John's long, hard journey to Malta began in 2001 when he and thousands of other University of Asmara students refused an Eritrean government order to work the whole summer without pay.



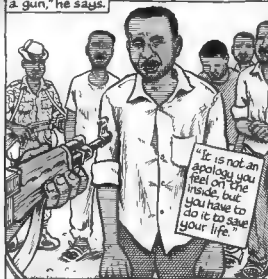
More than 2,000 students, including John, were arrested and loaded onto trucks.





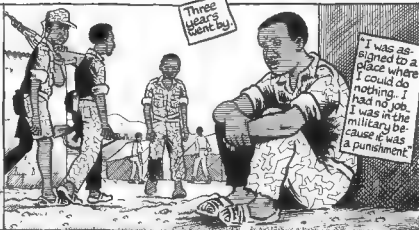
After a few weeks of incarceration, "one by one we were asked to apologize in front of a gun," he says.

The students thought the matter was closed, "but [the government] had long term plans for how to deal with us," he says. They were mobilized for national service.



John spent six months at hard labor

He had been on track for a university job, which normally would have counted as national service. Instead he was next ordered in to the army even though he had already fulfilled his military obligation. His transfer requests were turned down.



Finally, he publicly confronted an officer about his situation.



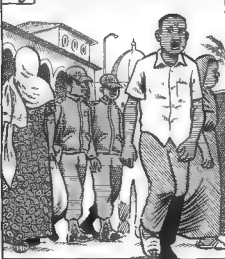
He was arrested and jailed the same day.



Upon his release a month later, he was told his annual leave had been rescinded.



The military police were now looking for him. He decided to flee the country.



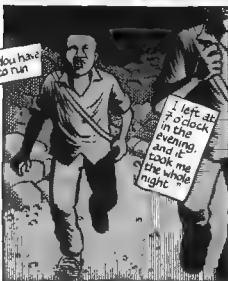


100 EUROS WERE APPROX. \$125 THEN

"You have to state on the piece of paper from which division of the army you are [from]. So they can simply call and check if they want."



For about 800 Euros, a smuggler guided him across the Sudanese border.



He turned himself in to the Sudanese police, who released him three days later to the desolate U.N. refugee camp in Kassala.



He decided to leave Kassala for the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, with a one-week pass.

"You [are] not allowed to simply leave and stay in Khartoum. You pay some money and you hand in your [UN] ID card to the police, just to make sure you will come back."

But John knew he would not be returning to Kassala for his ID

Once in Khartoum, if [the police] arrested you for some reason, if you didn't have a residence card there [was] a risk of deportation

"Without having legal status you don't feel safe to simply live."

"You feel that everyone is looking at you"

"If you see the police...you go far [to the other side]"

He stayed with an Eritrean friend, but John couldn't speak Arabic or find a job.

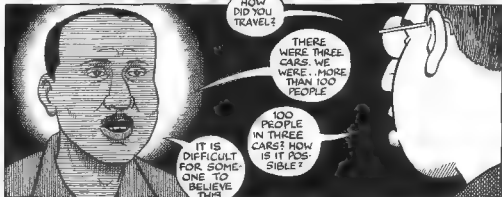
"I could not see any future."

THEY KNEW THAT THE SAHARA DESERT AND THE MEDITERRANEAN ARE RISKY. I MIGHT DIE ON THE WAY.

BUT, IF I WAS DEPORTED BACK TO ERITREA, THEY KNEW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO ME

His family sent him money to reach Europe.

He paid Eritrean contacts \$200 to pass him along to Sudanese smugglers who had gathered a group of would-be migrants—Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis, and Sudanese.



He found himself hanging on to the roof of a Land Cruiser.



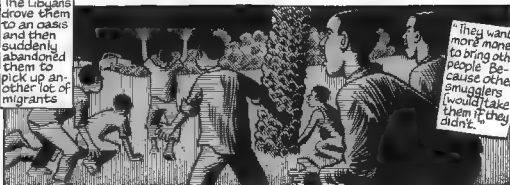
After traveling three days and nights they were handed over to Libyan smugglers in the middle of the desert.



Each of the migrants had to pay another \$300.



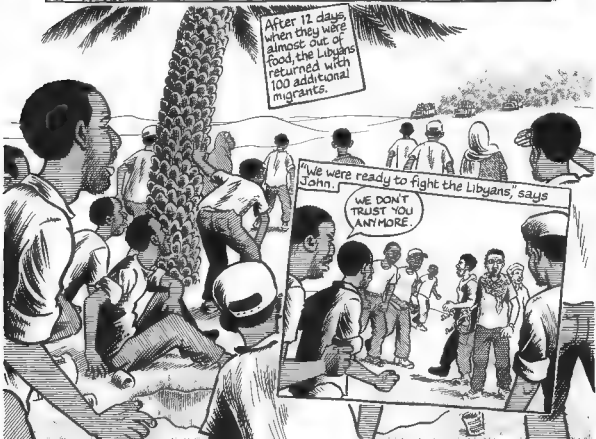
The Libyans drove them to an oasis and then suddenly abandoned them to pick up another lot of migrants.



The next day, Sudanese resistance fighters showed up and robbed the stranded group. Most of the migrants had prepared a wad of money for just such an eventuality.



After 12 days, when they were almost out of food, the Libyans returned with 100 additional migrants.



The Libyans agreed to take the first group onward, and two days later passed them off to another band of smugglers, who charged each person an additional \$50.



In a village outside of Benghazi, John was parceled off with about 20 others to a middleman who bought us, like a commodity, and who would now sell his trafficked guests to another set of smugglers, but not before charging the migrants \$200 each himself.



The new smugglers were Ethiopians, who—for an additional \$100 each—drove them the 1,000 kilometers to Tripoli in a hidden compartment inside a tomato truck.



They were packed so tightly that they had been compelled to leave behind all their belongings.



And if you hear the [truck] stopping, you have to keep quiet... because it might be stopping at a checkpoint.

At last they reached Tripoli, but Tripoli was the most horrible place I saw on my journey. It was very hostile. The police, the people. Very, very, very hostile towards immigrants.



"The people, especially children, stop you in the street and threaten you with a knife and ask you for money."



Adults never intervened to stop the young thieves, he says. "No-body cared."

He was staying with 200 other migrants in a building owned by an Ethiopian trafficker.



"The police might come at any time."

"The Libyans...knew that a lot of black people lived in this place"

"A lot of children [came] when they need[ed] money"

John decided he would be safer elsewhere. He moved to the outskirts of the city.

Two days later the building he'd left was raided by the police and its occupants were hauled away to the notorious detention camp at Kufra, John says.



He lay low for months and then paid \$1,000 to an Eritrean who put him in contact with Libyans who could facilitate a Mediterranean crossing.



The Libyans took him into a hiding place which began filling up with Africans hoping to make the same voyage. The 25 days there were tense, he says, with their hosts sometimes threatening to throw them all into the street.



It was now July 2006.

On the appointed day, before sunrise, the traffickers put 50 of the Africans onto a boat and sent them on their way to Europe.



They were caught by a Libyan patrol.

John had a space on the second boat due to leave that morning.



Despite the fate of the first vessel, he and the others pressed the Libyans to let them attempt the crossing.

WHAT WE WANTED AT THIS TIME WAS - A CHANCE!

TO BE ON THE SEA AND ON A BOAT.

THEN IT IS OUR LUCK IF SOMETHING HAPPENED, IF WE DROWNED OR THE POLICE CAME.

BUT THEY HAVE TO DO THEIR JOB. TAKE US TO THE SEA AND PROVIDE A BOAT



The Libyans assigned a captain from among the migrants and then turned on the motor for them.



They were on their own.

The "captain," a Ghanain, insisted he knew what he was doing.

"There is no way to check whether he knows or not... you just pray that he knows."

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO SIMPLY GO LIKE THIS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN, AND THEY SPEND THREE OR FOUR DAYS AND FINISH.

Estimates for the number of Africans who have perished trying to cross the sea range from the hundreds to more than 10,000.

"[The Libyans] gave us wrong information.

"They told us, 'After eight hours you will find Malta... and then... turn one degree north and you will be there in Sicily.

"And we traveled eight hours and we saw nothing

"We continue,

"We continue,

"We continue...

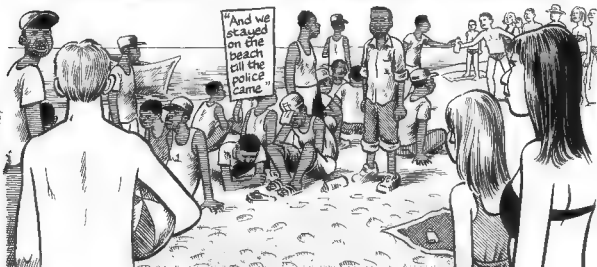
"We traveled the whole day,

"the whole night,

"without stopping,

"without switching off the motor.

"And we traveled the whole day again.



DETENTION

Once they land in Malta, all "irregular immigrants" are locked up and guarded in closed detention centers. Only those considered vulnerable — minors and pregnant women, for example — are fast-tracked out.

John, the Eritrean who arrived in Malta in 2006, remembers,

NOBODY TELLS YOU ABOUT YOUR OBLIGATIONS OR YOUR RIGHTS. NOBODY EXPLAINS WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN.

IT IS REALLY STRESSFUL [FOR] DETAINEES AND CREATES A SYSTEM OF FRUSTRATION... YOU LOSE HOPE

"[We] are people who are in need of help.

"On the contrary, they create a feeling that we are criminals and we need to be guarded by soldiers.

"[The detention centers] should be [staffed by] civilians and those who know how to take care of asylum seekers, who are victims of persecution and rape and all these things..."

Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, Minister of Justice and Home Affairs, who is most responsible for policy regarding immigrants, tells me.

THE DETENTION POLICY IS ODISIOUS FOR US... BUT IT IS A NECESSITY

He says the immigrants are an "unknown factor," that for "security reasons" they have to be screened to determine their backgrounds as "the majority do not have identification."

I CANNOT ALLOW... PERSONS RUNNING AROUND OUR STREETS WITH NO ACCOMMODATION...

KNOCKING ON DOORS TO GET FOOD,

WITHOUT ANY IDEA WHERE THEY CAME FROM,

AND WITH THE BIG IDEA THAT EUROPE IS AN EL DORADO.

Because deep in the government's heart is the suspicion that many if not most arrivals are economic migrants and not, as almost 100 percent of them claim, victims of war or persecution and that they often falsify their stories to wrangle some form of humanitarian protection — and legal status — from their reluctant hosts.

Refugee Commissioner Mario Friggieri, who runs the busy office that receives and decides on applications for asylum, tells me,

IT IS EASY TO SAY, 'I WAS IN MY COUNTRY AND I WAS PERSECUTED FOR MY POLITICAL OPINION...'

ANYBODY CAN SAY THAT.

YOU HAVE TO PROVE IT.

The asylum application process has always been difficult and frustrating, but it was once downright chaotic.

In a group of recently landed immigrants, John was the only one who could properly understand the English-language preliminary questionnaire.

I FILLED [OUT] MINE, AND I FILLED IT OUT FOR ABOUT 30 PEOPLE WHO WERE IN MY ROOM.

"There were some people from Sudan, and I couldn't communicate properly with them in Arabic."

"I didn't know myself that [the preliminary questionnaire] is very important and is a base for the asylum application."

About 55 percent of asylum applications are approved for some sort of humanitarian status.

APPROVED

sometimes in the form of the Geneva Convention's strictly defined refugee designation.

But more often through the European Union's more provisional "subsidiary protection" category.

Those whose applications are not successful are subject to deportation, a complicated procedure, not easily followed through, that involves obtaining travel documents from countries of origin.

REJECTED

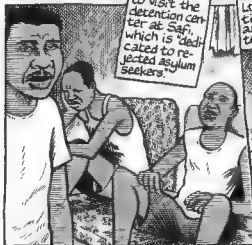
45%

Friggieri insists that each case is evaluated on its own merits, but immigrants from the conflict-ridden Horn of Africa are far more likely to get protection in Malta than those from countries that are merely poor (and whose governments are unstable).

Malta now separates detainees who are most likely to be rejected — West Africans — from those who stand a good chance — East Africans — when the hopefuls and the hopeless intermingled, the former sometimes lauded it over the latter, I'm told, which led to fighting between nationalities.



The Maltese government turns down my request to visit the detention center at Safi, which is "dedicated to rejected asylum seekers."



Lt. Col. Brian Gatt, who heads the Detention Service, the joint force of police and army personnel who guard the detainees, tells me.

THE PROBLEM WITH SAFI IS THAT IF THEY SEE A JOURNALIST, THEY GO BERSERK.

THEY COME OUT WITH POSTERS THEY MAKE A LOT OF NOISE.

THE TENSION RISES VERY QUICKLY.

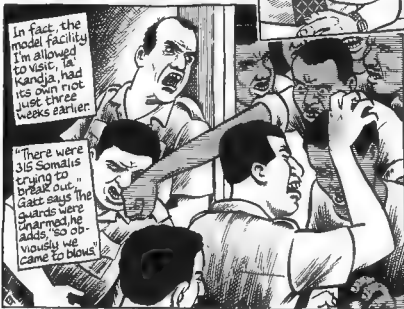


In fact, the model facility I'm allowed to visit, Ta' Kandja, had its own riot just three weeks earlier.

"There were 315 Somalis trying to break out," Gatt says. The guards were unarmed, he adds, "so obviously we came to blows."

The Somalis were demanding immediate release.

(Those granted some form of humanitarian protection are generally released within about six months. Those turned down may remain detained for a maximum of a year and a half.)





As one of the women fans me — it's rather warm in there — another walks up to show me her badly scarred arm



Because not even the Somalis can count on protection. In this room, 20 of 44 women have already had their asylum applications rejected

Raha, who says she has spent 13 months in detention, is appealing her rejection to the Refugee Appeals Board.



I don't tell her that of the thousands of asylum seekers in Malta who have appealed their rejections, "less than ten" have seen their decisions overturned, according to Refugee Commissioner Friggieri.





I ask the detainees if they have complaints about their living quarters.



There is nothing to do here, few ways to while away the time except to watch TV. This is essentially a locked waiting room.



I won't vouch for Ta' Kandra resembling Guantanamo, but several human rights reports have blasted Malta's detention facilities:

"unacceptable from the point of view of human dignity";

"migrants are not treated as well as incarcerated criminals";

"unacceptable for a civilized country and untenable in Europe";

"disastrous sanitary facilities";

"clearly inhuman and degrading."

Like all Maltese officials I meet, Lt. Col Gatt scoffs at most criticism of the nation's detention policy and facilities



AS A GENERAL RULE, THE PEOPLE IN DETENTION ARE TREATED WITH HUMANITY.

He denies they suffer mental health problems due to their prolonged detention.



As to the charges of degraded facilities, Gatt says, "West Africans take pride in keeping their areas clean [but] East Africans don't give a damn. The majority are Muslim, they are Arab-oriented and living in squalor... for them is no problem."

In any case, Gatt tells me, Malta has limited resources and when the immigrants started landing in numbers, "we didn't have any purpose-built structures to accommodate [them]."



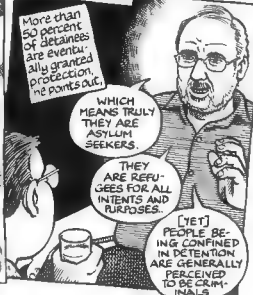
Father Joseph Cassar, director of Jesuit Refugee Service, which does advocacy work on behalf of detainees and offers them legal advice, rejects the policy of prolonged detention

More than 50 percent of detainees are eventually granted protection, he points out,

WHICH MEANS TRULY THEY ARE ASYLUM SEEKERS.

THEY ARE REFUGEES FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES.

[YET] PEOPLE BEING CONFINED IN DETENTION ARE GENERALLY PERCEIVED TO BE CRIMINALS.



Whether or not they finally are deemed worthy of protection, the immigrants are locked up for months, kept under guard, surrounded by barbed wire, handcuffed when taken to hospital.



It irregular immigrants are treated like prisoners, is it any wonder that the Maltese assume they've done something wrong?

OPEN CENTERS

I wander into Tent No 33 at the Hal Far Tent Village and introduce myself.

A couple of guys from Togo are sharing a pan of rice.

and a Somali named Abdullah is cooking some potatoes

These men are so-called "freedom" those immigrants finally released from detention to open centers, the last supervised stop before Malta tells them to fend for themselves

Abdullah has lived here for a year, and he is "not satisfied" with his accommodations.

He says he's from a city, Magadishu, and until he was assigned here, he'd only ever seen tents on television

BEFORE I RAN FROM THE FIGHTING, BUT NOW I WANT TO RUN FROM THE TENTS...

Abdullah shows me around.

The tent village, which is isolated in a remote corner of the island, reminds me of desolate refugee camps I've seen elsewhere.

It has 500 immigrants on its roster and needs to make room for 43 new "freedoms" this week.

"Freedoms" are allowed to move around Malta as they wish, but if they are gone too long from their assigned open center, they are struck off the rolls.

Mario Camilleri, the government coordinator at the tent village, tells me,

AFTER EIGHT WEEKS WE RECLAIM THEIR LIVING SPACE

ONCE THEY'RE OUT OF THE SYSTEM, THEY STAY OUT.

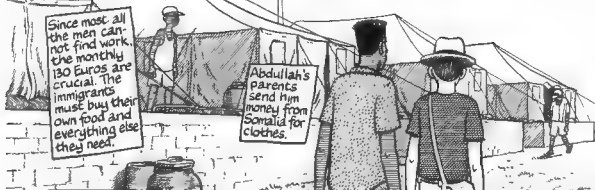
In other words, they will no longer be eligible for a bunk or the modest allowance they receive.

THE GOVERNMENT GIVES US 130 EUROS A MONTH

The catch is you need to be here three times a week to sign in for the money.

IF YOU MISS [SIGNING] ONE TIME, YOU CAN LOSE 32 EUROS.

And if you find steady employment, you forfeit eligibility for the hand-out and can never reclaim it, even if you are laid off later.



He leads me to a friend named Omar. Omar's time in detention and the tents has made him crazy, Abdullah claims.



I'm told Omar is so mentally damaged that he hasn't been signing for his 130-Euro allowance



But when Abdullah produces Omar, Camilleri smells a rat.

EVERY DAY IT'S SOMETHING NEW!

GO LOOK AT THE BULLETIN BOARD!

TAKE HIM TO THE CLINIC IN FLO-RIANA!

Medical care is free in Malta, and if Abdullah is so interested in his friend's well being, why doesn't he take his pal to get checked up?

HERE WE ARE NOT YOUR PAR-ENTS!

Camilleri tells me the immigrants are always trying to game the system, but perhaps no one has a better insight into that than Ahmed Bugri, a Maltese citizen of Ghanaian origin, who manages the Marsa Open Center.

When residents saw he was paying some of them to clean the facility, they "intentionally" threw garbage on the ground, he says.

THE MORE CLEANERS I EMPLOYED, THE MORE IT BECAME DIRTY... THEY LITTERED THE CENTER TO CREATE EMPLOYMENT.

And could you blame them.

Bugri estimates that only about five percent of his residents land a few hours of work on any given day...

and that only ten of the hundreds living in Marsa actually are gainfully employed

The rest of them have nothing to do.

"They just walk up and down, roaming aimlessly," he says.

Others
do only
too well

I KNOW
PEOPLE AT
MARSA OPEN
CENTER WHO
CAN GIVE YOU
10,000 EUROS
CASH, IF YOU
NEED IT

The open
center was
turned in-
to a "mafia
town," he
says.

When small
shops and
kitchens
were opened
on site to
"empower"
the resi-
dents, a
class of op-
erators be-
gan treat-
ing the busi-
nesses as
their own
property,
even selling
"ownership"
for thou-
sands of
Euros.

Meanwhile, the
poorest immi-
grants are
forced to buy
from these
shops and
restaurants
on credit.

BEFORE
A PERSON
RECEIVES HIS
CHECK, HE'S
ALREADY
SPENT IT

Bugri says he is
battling to wrest
control of the
businesses from
their "owners"—
many of whom
live off site —
and is creating a
cooperative
that will let every-
one benefit.

There are
ethnic ten-
sions at
the open
center as
well.

"All the shops
were owned
by Somalis,"
he says. "All
the best
rooms were
Somali... And
so they pushed
the West Afri-
cans and Echi-
opians to the
back [rooms]."

"There are
fights, but
the Somalis
are the ma-
jority so
they always
win the fight."



Whatever its problems, the centrally-located Marsa Open Center, with its restaurants, shops, mosque, chapel, internet cafe, and playing field, is a focal point of African life in Malta and a short walk from the prime gathering spot for day laborers.

African men assigned to other open centers, especially the uncomfortable tent village and a converted airplane hangar in far-off Hal Far, tend to congregate here.

They often spend the night.

In fact,

ALL OF THEM ARE MOVING TO MARSA.

AND THAT'S BECOME OUR NIGHT-MARE

WE'RE SUPPOSED TO HAVE 700 PEOPLE IN MARSA; WE HAVE 1,500

OUR DATA BASE IS A HOAX IT DOESN'T TALLY



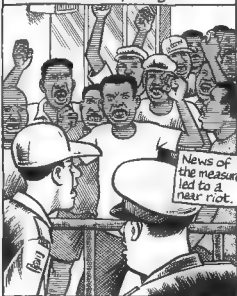
Eventually, the 'guests' lose their assigned bed at Hal Far;

they are deleted from the system;

they are no longer eligible for their monthly 130 Euros;

and they are sleeping on the floor at Marsa Open Center without permission.

A proposed security system would keep close tabs on non-resident visitors to the Marsa facility.



News of the measure led to a near riot.

Malta's policy has essentially created wide cracks for "freedom" to fall through. Technically, the maximum period the immigrants are allowed to stay at the open centers is one year.

After that their monthly allowance is stopped and they are expected to move out and make it on their own.

Minister Mifsud Bonnici doesn't seem moved by my bleeding-heart concern for their future.

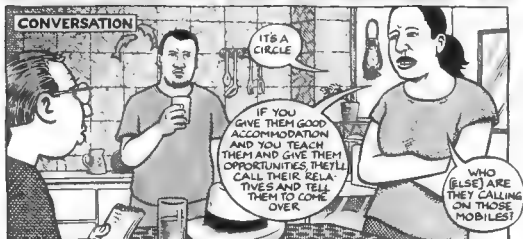
THEY JUST PARK THEMSELVES IN THOSE [CENTERS], AND THEY STAY THERE EXPECTING THE GOVERNMENT TO DO SOMETHING FOR THEM.

THEY HAVE TO FIGHT TO LIVE IN THE WESTERN WORLD.

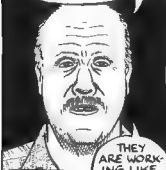
IF YOU DO NOT PUSH THEM TO DO THIS, THEY DO NOT MOVE.

Most of the immigrants who have left the open centers live hand-to-mouth and are crammed in rented flats in places like St. Paul's Bay and Birzebbuga, where other Africans have moved.

This, then, is what a "freedom" waiting out his year at an open center has to look forward to in a country that can barely stand the sight of him.



I'M NOT A RACIST, BUT THEY'RE TAKING WORK...THEY'RE WORKING MORE THAN EIGHT HOURS A DAY FOR VERY LITTLE MONEY, FOR POCKET MONEY..



ROSARIO

THEY ARE WORKING LIKE SLAVES

FIRST OF ALL, THEY CAME HERE TO TAKE OUR WORK. THEY WORK FOR LESS FOR A LONG TIME. THEY WORK WITHOUT SICK LEAVE, WITHOUT CONDITIONS



BENNY

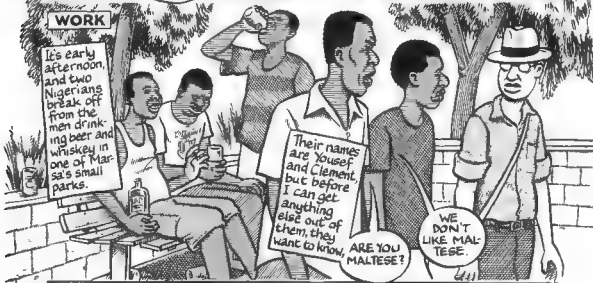
...SMALL COMPANIES GO AND BRING THREE OR FOUR IMMIGRANTS...AND IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO THE IMMIGRANTS, NO PROBLEM, THEY BRING ANOTHER ONE



SALVU

WORK

It's early afternoon, and two Nigerians break off from the men drinking beer and whiskey in one of Marsa's small parks.



Their names are Yousef and Clement, but before I can get anything else out of them, they want to know,

ARE YOU MALTESE?

WE DON'T LIKE MALTESE.

They got out of detention last week, but they carry an atmosphere of utter dejection about them.

They rose before dawn to take the bus from Hal Far to this side of the island and have been looking for a job all day.

IF YOU ENTER AND ASK FOR A JOB, THEY START LAUGHING AT YOU.

WE ARE GOING TO DIE OF HUNGER HERE.

WE ARE CONFUSED.

ALL DAY WE ARE CONTINUOUSLY TREKKING.

They've just walked from Sliema to Marsa in the boiling sun to save on bus fare.

Both men have been designated "rejects," meaning their asylum applications have been turned down.

Unlike immigrants granted humanitarian status, they can only get a work permit if a potential employer agrees to jump through bureaucratic hoops to sponsor them

In other words:
fat chance!

Their only hope is off-the-books day labor.

THEY
ABANDON
US HERE

But surely the government has given you part of your monthly allowance as a start

THEY GAVE US
24 EUROS TO BUY
OUR CLOTHES, OUR
FOOD, EVERY-
THING.

WE DON'T
HAVE POTS
WE DON'T HAVE
GAS. THAT 24
EUROS CANNOT
BUY POTS AND
PLATES.

WE USE
THE MONEY
TO EAT IN
RESTAU-
RANTS

Couldn't you take advantage of the free job training or educational benefits Malta claims to provide?

IF I
START
SCHOOL
NOW. WHO
WILL PAY TO
FEED ME?

OUR
TALENTS
WILL DIE
WITH US
HERE.

They want to move to mainland Europe, but,

WE HAVE NO PERMISSION TO LEAVE THIS COUNTRY...

Only those with humanitarian protection can acquire temporary travel papers.

There is another way out: enlisting a smuggler to get them to Italy.

Even though Italy has cracked down hard on irregular immigrants —

it even turns back boats in international waters before any passenger can land and ask for asylum

— perhaps one can keep a step ahead of the police and disappear into the African communities there or further north, across the Alps.

Such is this woman's hope.

She says she's fled from Darfur, but the man who introduces us thinks she's actually from Chad.

She is a "double reject," meaning the Refugee Appeals Board let the negative verdict on her asylum application stand

Her son had himself smuggled from Malta to Italy, and maybe she can follow in the same way

Meanwhile, she is struggling to pay for the apartment she shares.

She just worked 11 days as a chambermaid and received only 130 Euros.

Yes, the hotel manager ripped her off, but without a work permit she has no recourse

Our mutual acquaintance worries she will drift into prostitution.

A few days later, I get up early to join immigrants, mostly West African "rejects," waiting near the Marisa Open Center for a day labor job.

These two guys, Charles and Samuel, are from Nigeria, and, like the woman I'd met recently, they have no work permit. They tell me how Maltese employers take advantage of the fact.

THEY WILL USE YOU TO WORK, AND THEN THEY ASK YOU FOR A WORK PERMIT AND WON'T PAY YOU [WITHOUT IT].

IF WE CALL THE POLICE, THEY WILL ASK FOR THE WORK PERMIT [TOO]

They don't have a legal leg to stand on, and the competition, as the occasional car stops to scoop up a worker or two, is fierce.

TWENTY OR 30 PEOPLE RUN TO THE CAR.

AND THEN THEY WILL [OFFER] WHAT THEY LIKE.

BECAUSE THERE ARE MANY OF US, IF YOU DON'T AGREE [TO THE WAGE], SOMEONE ELSE WILL.

SOME STOP AND WHEN YOU RUN TO THE CAR THEY SAY, 'FUCK YOU!'...AND JUST GO.

Neither of these men have had much luck finding work.

Samuel says he has worked only three times in the month since he was released from detention.

IS THERE ANY PLACE YOU CAN DIRECT US TO GET A JOB?

I visit another group of men further up.

Mohammed from Ghana is one of the lucky ones.

He says he's been employed two weeks running as a plasterer, earning 20-25 Euros a day.

He is waiting for his employer to pick him up.

SOME PEOPLE STAY HERE FOR MONTHS, WEEKS, AND THEY HAVEN'T WORKED ONCE.

As if to prove his point, a young man from Togo steps forward.

He hasn't worked at all since he was made a "freedom" one month ago.

He comes here every day to try his luck, meaning he hasn't been signing in for his allowance at Hal Far.

Expressing the frustration of the West Africans in Malta who are "rejects,"

who are subject to deportation,

who can neither obtain a work permit nor papers to reach another European country,

who will disappear into Malta's minigettoes with no legal status or prospects at all,

Mohammed says,

WE HAVE ALL PASSED THROUGH THE SEA. WE ARE ALL HUMAN BEINGS

THEY DON'T HAVE TO TREAT SOMALIS BETTER THAN US.

WE ARE ALL CREATED BY GOD.

HOW DO YOU EXPECT ME TO EAT?

DO YOU WANT ME TO ROB?

YOU CAN'T TELL ME, 'YOU DON'T HAVE A PERMIT, YOU CAN'T WORK.'

WE ARE SUFFERING EVEN MORE THAN IN OUR OWN COUNTRY.

But suddenly a van stops, and the guy from Togo doesn't wait to hear out Mohammed's lament.

Only one other fellow seems to have seen the vehicle.

There's a quick discussion with the driver, and then both men hop in.



Our Togolese pal has landed his first job.



YOU CAN'T INTEGRATE THEM WE'RE TOO DIFFERENT

IN ENGLAND THEY DON'T WANT THEM TO PUT A CROSS IN THE SCHOOL. IF THEY DON'T WANT TO SEE THE CROSS, THEY SHOULD STAY IN SOMALIA

THIS COUNTRY IS OURS, NOT THEIRS

ROMINA

ADDITIONALLY IN NOV 2009, A EUROPEAN COURT TOLD ITALY TO REMOVE CRUCIFIXES FROM THE WALLS OF STATE SCHOOLS

I DON'T SEE ANY PROSPECT OF SETTLING DOWN [IN MALTA].

I WANT TO GO TO A COUNTRY WHERE I FEEL I BELONG...OR BACK TO ERITREA IF PEACE COMES TO MY COUNTRY

IT'S TRUE I'M LIVING IN MALTA, BUT IN REALITY I'M LIVING IN THE AFRICAN COMMUNITY IN MALTA.

JOHN

INTEGRATION

Ahmed Bugri, the manager of the Mārsa Open Center, married in Malta and has lived here for almost two decades.

FOR THREE YEARS MY FATHER-IN-LAW TOLD ME HE DIDN'T WANT A BLACK MAN IN HIS FAMILY



BUT NOW HE'S SEEN ME TAKE CARE OF MY WIFE... AND TAKE CARE OF MY CHILDREN.

NOW HE LOVES ME AS A SON.

But Bugn is not hopeful about the integration of other Africans.

"The Maltese are scared having black people populate this place," he says. "[They] want the migrants out."

And the Africans want exactly the same thing:

to get off this small island, to reach the European mainland.

What is the point, asks Minister Mifsud Bonnici, of trying to integrate people who don't want to live here?

...WE DO A LOT OF WORK, WE INVEST A LOT OF TIME, OF MONEY AND RESOURCES ON PERSONS. WHO WE MUST ACCEPT ...DO NOT LOOK AT [MALTA] AS THEIR FINAL DESTINATION...

Malta is just their "stepping stone," he insists.

His job is to get the rest of Europe to acknowledge that and take Africans with humanitarian status off Malta's hands.

Mifsud Bonnici warms to the idea of a better life for Africans on the continent.

ONCE YOU ARE IN PORTUGAL, YOU HAVE ACCESS TO SWEDEN OR FINLAND.

YOU CAN GO IN A CAR, AND YOU CAN DRIVE YOUR WAY UP.

One gets the impression the minister would drive them there himself, if only someone would take them, if only the Africans would—in a phrase he repeats over and over—

MOVE ON.



But Mifsud Bonnici is a big-picture man.

He knows the Maltese voters, he knows the budgetary constraints, he needs to ease the pressure on a tiny nation straining under sudden social, cultural, and racial problems generated by wars, poverty, and climate change somewhere far, far away.



Francis Debono, the mayor of Marsa, knows the voters, too.

He and they live cheek-by-jowl with hundreds of African men at the open center.

He is much less hopeful than the minister that mainland Europe will integrate great numbers of Malta's Africans.



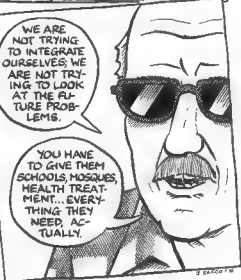
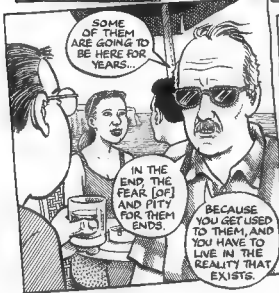
SOME OF THEM ARE GOING TO BE HERE FOR YEARS...

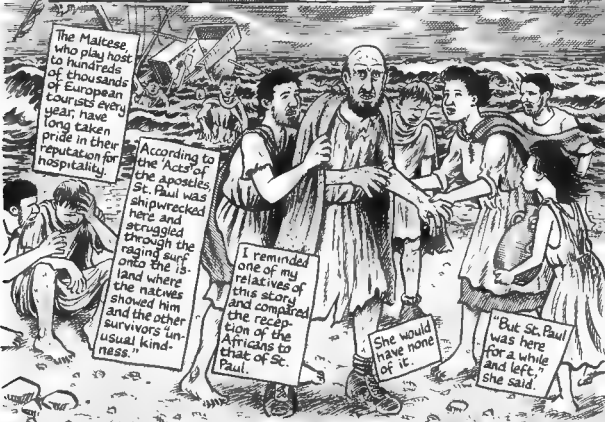
IN THE END, THE FEAR [OF] AND PITY FOR THEM ENDS.

BECAUSE YOU GET USED TO THEM, AND YOU HAVE TO LIVE IN THE REALITY THAT EXISTS.

WE ARE NOT TRYING TO INTEGRATE OURSELVES; WE ARE NOT TRYING TO LOOK AT THE FUTURE PROBLEMS.

YOU HAVE TO GIVE THEM SCHOOLS, MOSQUES, HEALTH TREATMENT... EVERYTHING THEY NEED, ACTUALLY.





I thought there was no better place to report on the issue of African migration to Europe than my own birthplace, Malta. For one thing, as a Maltese I figured local people would be less reticent with me about their feelings toward the Africans who had landed on the island. For another, though English is widely spoken there, it is not spoken by everyone, and my fair knowledge of the Maltese language would allow me to operate without a translator. Also, Malta is a small country, one of those places where one can make an appointment with the ministers and officials who are the chief architects and administrators of policy. Finally, this story could be easily told from the perspective of the Africans, who were approachable in the camps and centers where they lived and in the streets while they looked for work. Fortunately, with forty-eight pages, the *Virginia Quarterly Review* gave me plenty of room to cover all these bases. Though obviously my sympathies are with the migrants, who had endured tremendous hardships to reach such

an unwelcoming place whatever their reasons for setting out across the Mediterranean Sea, I thought it was incumbent on me to treat the fears and apprehensions of the Maltese people seriously. Few peoples, I'm afraid, are up to the challenge of absorbing large and sudden influxes of outsiders, especially those of a different color. My own people are no better than anyone else.

"The Unwanted" appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in two parts in the Winter 2010 and Spring 2010 issues



INDIA

KUSHINAGAR

This is how our story ends

By Jiv
Jiv
67 1010

Together with my guide, the Indian reporter Piyush Srivastava, I am sitting in a hut blackened by cooking smoke with two men we have gotten to know these last three days

They are Dalits once called "Untouchables" the people who perch on the bottommost rung of India's caste system

In fact these two, Bheem and Sib Charan, are Musahars, a lowly sub-caste even among the Dalits.

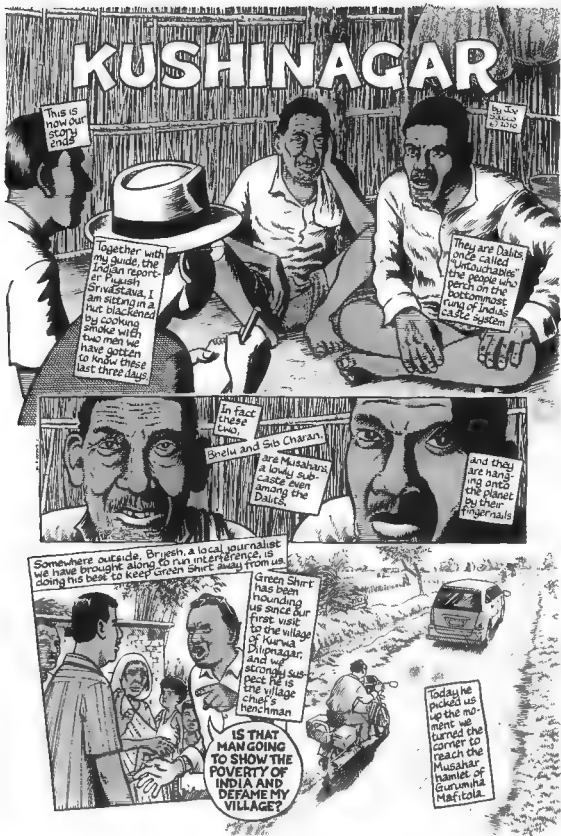
and they are hanging onto the planet by their fingernails

Somewhere outside, Brijesh, a local journalist we have brought along to run interference, is doing his best to keep Green Shirt away from us

Green Shirt has been hounding us since our first visit to the village of Kurwa Dilpargar; and we strongly suspect he is the village chief's henchman

IS THAT MAN GOING TO SHOW THE POVERTY OF INDIA AND DEFAME MY VILLAGE?

Today he picked us up the moment we turned the corner to reach the Musahar hamlet of Gurumihla Mafitola



Green Shirt was born into the Other Backward Classes, an officially designated group of castes who are generally disadvantaged but who consider themselves the human superiors of the Dalits.

Further up the scale are the Forward Castes — Brahmins, Rajputs and others — before whom Dalits and Backward Classes obligingly bow and scrape.

In rural India especially, the caste-based tiers form daunting barriers to any sort of social or economic mobility and are the ready-made framework around which the vines of inequality twirl and thrive.

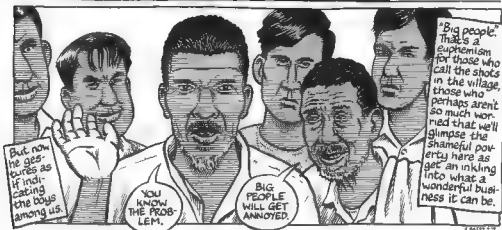
As if by right, then, Green Shirt can hinder our meeting with the Mughals; he can barge in and try to stop it.

and if Bryesh manages to deflect him,

he can't contain a group of higher caste teenagers who suddenly surround the hut and peer over the Dakhi women listening in.



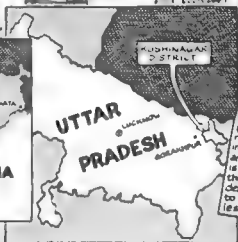
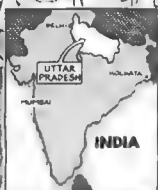
I'm taken aback. I hadn't considered how our daily visits might be interfering with the grim business of survival here in the Kushinagar district of Uttar Pradesh, one of India's poorest states.



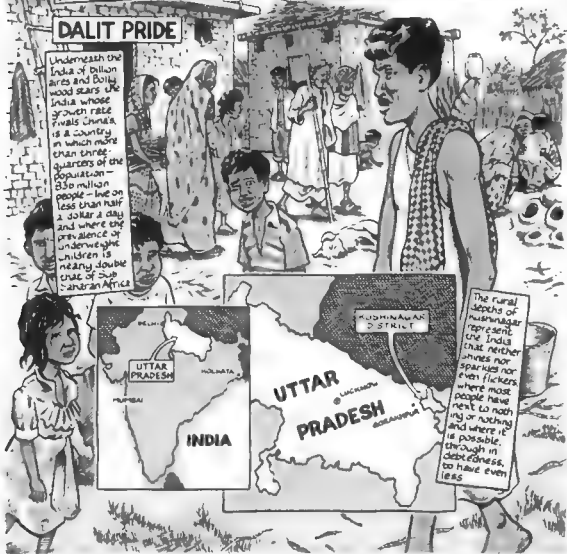


DALIT PRIDE

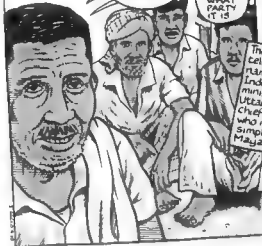
Underneath the India of Billionaires and Bollywood stars the India whose grown rate rivals China's, is a country in which more than three-quarters of the population—830 million people—live on less than half a dollar a day and where the prevalence of underweight children is nearly double that of Sub-Saharan Africa.

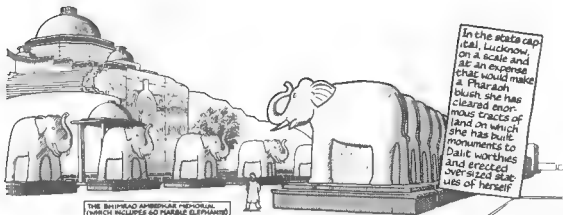


The rural depths of Kushinagar represent the India that neither shines nor sparkles nor even flickers, where most people have next to nothing or nothing and where it is possible, through in debtlessness, to have even less.

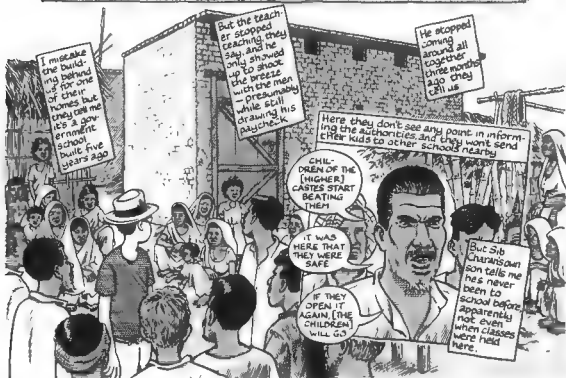


For the Musahars of the Gurumaha Masficola hamlet, the below the Poverty Line definition which government committees endlessly recalibrate is a moot point because the issue is not merely poverty, which might be bearable, but hunger





In her fiery speeches she trumpets "Dalit Pride," but here in Kushinagar, the Dalits who bring out chairs for us at our first meeting will not dare to sit with upper caste visitors or a white man



Indeed, what good would a little education do? What? Education?

What does Sib Charan expect from his kids?

WE ASK THEM TO DO SOMETHING (NO) BRING SOME FOOD

What does his wife, Suvanti, hope for their children?

I DON'T THINK ANYTHING ABOUT IT

What does their son, Rajinder, want out of life?

I HAVE NO PLAN

Here there is no electricity, no toilet, no 11th or 10th or 19th century convenience of any kind

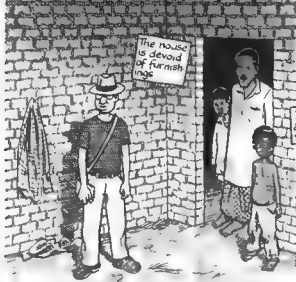
What the hamlet does have are three hand operated water pumps, put in about ten years ago and brick houses

The houses were paid for by the government under a program named for former prime minister Indira Gandhi.

Sib Charan says the government gave him 15,000 rupees to build, of which 5,000 was scooped off by an official

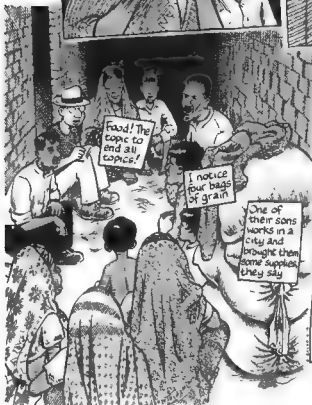
Sib Charan and a son pooled their hand aics and built this modest perucure

We ask to be used in



A sari costs the equivalent of a bit more than \$2, but,

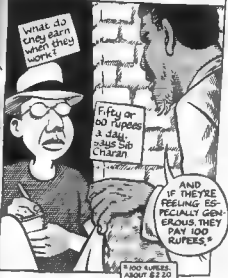
WE DON'T HAVE ANY BALANCE AFTER SPENDING ON FOOD



I notice four bags of grain

One of their sons works in a city and brought them some supplies, they say

Otherwise, they subsist on government-subsidized rations (more about those later) which they pay for with what they earn as agricultural day laborers

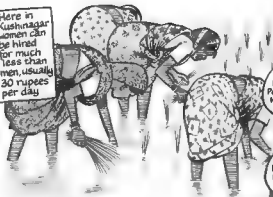


Fifty or 60 rupees a day, says Sib Charan

AND IF THEY'RE FEELING ESPECIALLY GENEROUS, THEY PAY 100 RUPEES.*

* 100 RUPEES ABOUT \$220

Here in Kushi Nagar women can be hired for much less than men, usually 30 rupees per day



Suvanti says she works for 20. Does she know that the minimum wage is 100 rupees?

WHAT IS THE POINT OF KNOWING IT?

MEN MAKE 100 RUPEES, WOMEN MAKE 20 RUPEES

HOW DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE IF I KNOW?



In any case, agricultural jobs are steady only during the planting and harvesting season, which she says adds up to just two months a year.



It is March and the last time there was any such work for most all the Dalits we talk to was in October or November when they brought in the rice crop.

Meanwhile, mechanization is slowly but surely making their labor superfluous



BEFORE WE USED TO GET SOME WORK. WE DON'T GET IT NOW

MOST OF THE WORK IS DONE BY TRACTORS AND MACHINES



ANGAMI DEVI

To supplement their pitiful income, a government scheme supposedly provides jobs to the rural poor.



But none of the Dalits we meet worked more than a fraction of the 100 days guaranteed every year, and many had never even heard of the program.

With such meager prospects for earnings, we are still trying to understand how they survive

THINGS
HAVE REACHED
A STAGE WHERE
WE DON'T EVEN
FEEL HUN-
GER.

But people do feel hunger

How do they fill their bellies?

FROM
HITHER
AND
THITHER

Bhelli says
they aug-
ment their
diet with
snails and
with mud-
fish caught
by hand
from pools
of water.



Subant:
answers
our queries
without
hesitation:

THE
WOMEN GO
TO THE FIELDS
WHERE THE RATS
ARE, AND WE COL-
LECT THE GRAINS THAT
THEY STORE IN THEIR
HOLES, AND WE
BRING THEM
HERE

WE
GO THERE
EVERY
DAY

Who goes?

Just the women?

ALL
OF
US!

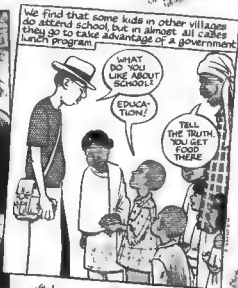
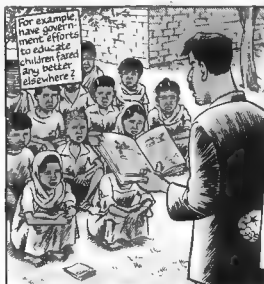
AND CHIL-
DREN!

EVEN
MEN!





SO MANY SCHEMES



In fact, we find a general skepticism about education

In some cases a child's labor value trumps whatever are the perceived benefits of sitting in class

Some of the Musahars we meet in the village of Manpur are lucky enough to find employment at a local brick kiln

Mahant Prasad says,

OUR ENTIRE FAMILY GOES THERE EXCEPT MY MOTHER

MY YOUNGEST DAUGHTER IS SEVEN YEARS OLD SHE GOES ALSO

At the kilns work is paid by the piece \$3 if the toughest hands can carry just a single brick at a time, they still would contribute something



In the same village, we find that some of the Musahars inherited small fields doled out during previous government land redistribution schemes



But most of them sold their land to buy the necessities their wages cannot cover and to pay off the loans they inevitably must take from money-lending sharks—who charge interest as high as 10 percent per month

Jaishri Prasad, who has tuberculosis, sold his tiny plot to pay off a 30,000-rupee debt for medicine and food



PROBLEM AFTER PROBLEM

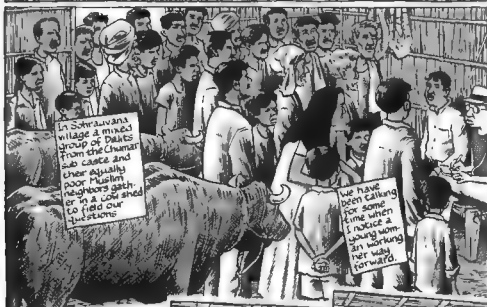
HIS WIFE, PHULA DEVI

Mahant Prasad sold his sixth of an acre to pay back a bank loan he took out to cover the grain he'd bought on credit

ONE OF THE FOOD GRAIN SHOP OWNERS TOOK MY LAND AND HE PAID (OFF) THE 25,000 RUPEES (I OWED) THE BANK AND THE OTHER SHOP KEEPERS



Raydeo sold part of his land to pay off a 10,000-rupee debt



Suddenly she is in front of us, demanding to know what all of the commotion is about

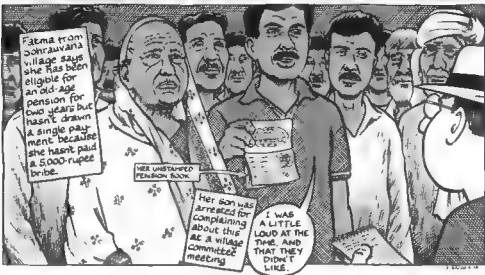




Later, in a hotel room in Gorakhpur, we meet a different sort of person, Ashok Choudhary, who was a leading local Dalit activist before turning to journalism



In fact, we find instances of the poor being asked to become poorer in order to access their benefits



But let's look at just one government program, maybe the most essential to the Dalits we meet, most of whom haven't had steady work in months

The Public Distribution System allocates color-coded ration cards to heads of below-the-poverty-line and other poor households

A person with such a card can purchase 35 kg of grain a month from designated shops at heavily subsidized rates

Jashn Prasad from Maunpur village, who hasn't had a job in two years because of his tuberculosis, tells us,

HOW CAN IT WORK! (THAT AMOUNT) IS PEANUTS FOR SIX PEOPLE FOR ONE MEAL WE NEED 2 KG

And so if his family eats twice a day, the 35 kg will last for less than nine days

IT HAPPENS THREE OR FOUR DAYS A MONTH THAT WE DON'T EAT ANYTHING

But what do you say to your children when there's no food?

IF I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING, THEY HAVE TO LEARN THAT

But let us set aside Jashn Prasad's complaint that the amount of grain subsidized isn't enough

Who has the major role in deciding who gets a ration card?

The village chief chooses who he kicks a list of names up the bureaucracy chain

Through a quota system, the elected office of village chief is often reserved for a Dalit

But the power behind that Dalit is most likely the same upper caste hierarchy that has always run the show.



In Sohrawana village, where an adult died of hunger some months ago...

local journalists have documented 45 adult hunger deaths in Rushinagar since 2005

Ram Pints pulls up his clothes to show us his withered limbs

He says the rations here are controlled by the village chief's brother-in-law.

HE GIVES MY SHARE TO OTHER PEOPLE

SOME TIMES I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO EAT

Ram Pints family is kept going by money sent by a relative working as a manual laborer in Mumbai

Virendra Sharma, standing nearby, claims he's taken on the man behind the village chief.

WE ARE SUPPOSED TO GET 35KG OF FOOD GRAIN. BUT WE ONLY GET 15.

I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT MYSELF

I TOOK 25 KG

I CAN FIGHT FOR MY RIGHTS

THE OTHERS ARE NOT READY TO FIGHT.

WHY DON'T YOU TELL THEM FRANKLY THAT YOU BRIBED HIM

Bigani, a widow from Manpur village, tells us,

THE VILLAGE CHIEF SAYS MY [RATION] CARD HAS BEEN CANCELLED.

HE SAYS THERE IS AN ERROR ON MY CARD AND I SHOULD GO TO THE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE IN PADRAUNA TO GET IT CORRECTED

Like most Dalits we meet, Bigani believes that appealing to government officials is a waste of time. All are perceived as corrupt

I'LL NOT GO ANYWHERE

She has been forced to buy grain on credit and has sold her land to pay that debt.

Everyone we speak to in her village says that only 30 kg of grain is dispensed at the subsidized rate

Shouldn't it be 35 kg?

WE DON'T QUESTION SUCH THINGS.

WE GET 30 KG OF RICE, AND THAT'S ALL WE KNOW

And the missing grain?

That can be sold on the open market for a tidy profit

We hear a motorcycle pull up outside the enclosed area where we're talking

The village chief has arrived, and he must have overheard some of our conversation

WHY ARE YOU SAYING ALL THESE THINGS?

DON'T YOU GET YOUR FOOD GRAIN?

Then he roars away, afraid, it seems, to speak to us

We would also like to meet the village chief of Kurwa Dhipnagar, where we've done most of our field work

But he breaks our appointments two or three times.

"I'm not running away from you," he assures my guide, Pyush, on the phone, but he soon stops answering our calls all together

I ask Sub Charan and Bhiku whether they see much of him in the hamlet

HE DOESN'T COME HERE

Unless it's election time they say

Then he "comes to every house" promising better dwellings and land

THE SONS OF VISHNU

Less than a minute's drive away the rays of Kurma Dhip nagar sit in shady repose and survey their Dalit hirelings beating the seed out of mustard plants

Of course they are not really rays any more

India did away with its multitude of princely states at independence

— but one might be forgiven for thinking otherwise upon meeting the Singh brothers, with their palace as a backdrop and their attendants at the ready

In fact

WE ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF LORD VISHNU

This is Upendra, the eldest of six brothers who have reclaimed the run-down, 150-year-old royal residence after the family lived elsewhere for decades. They intend to restore the building to its former luster.

AND IT WILL HAPPEN.

THIS IS OUR IDENTITY. THIS IS OUR ROOT.



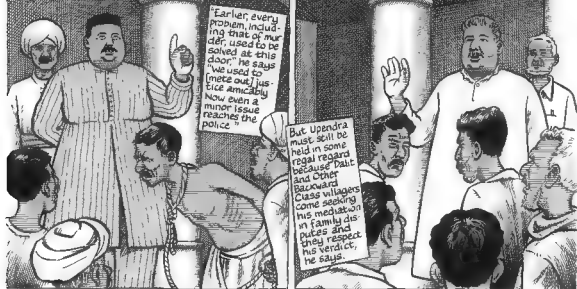
Would you rule again, I ask, if you had the chance?

YOU ARE TALKING THE IMPOSSIBLE.

Still, Upendra is happy to rhapsodize about his family's beneficent rule in that officially vanished feudal era.

THE OLDER PEOPLE WHO REMEMBER BEFORE INDEPENDENCE BELIEVE THAT PERIOD WAS BETTER.

THERE WAS DISCIPLINE, THERE WAS HONESTY, THERE WAS CHARACTER.



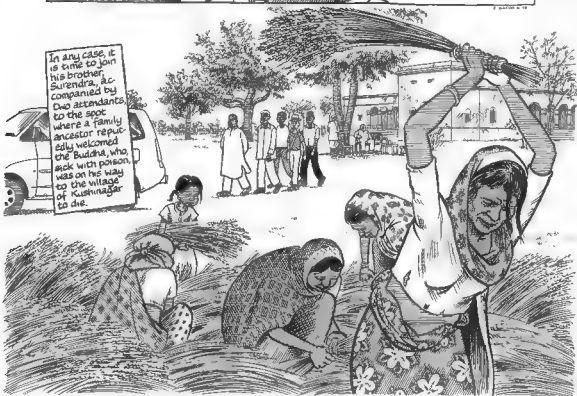
Have there been any improvements since the passing of the princely states?

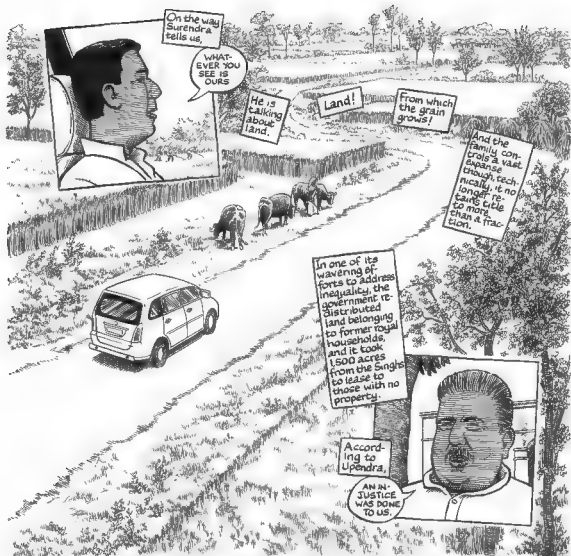
Well, yes

THOSE PEOPLE YOU ARE STUDYING THE MUSAHARS, THEY HAVE CLOTHES TODAY BUT JUST TEN YEARS AGO THEY WORE LOINCLOTHS. THEY HAD MUD HOUSES

NOW EVEN THEIR CHILDREN ARE GOING TO SCHOOL

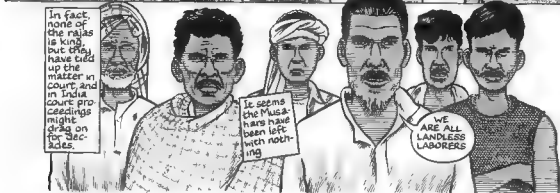
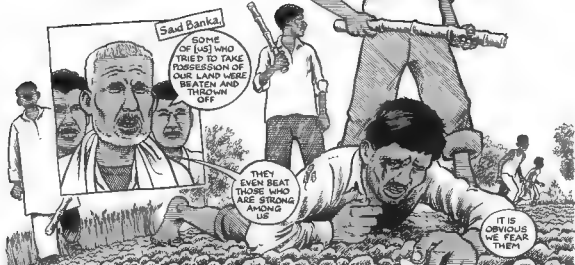
I do not interfere with the news that the Musahar children living nearby are searching for rat food instead of attending class





Hundreds of the landless, including many from the Musahar hamlet, were the beneficiaries.





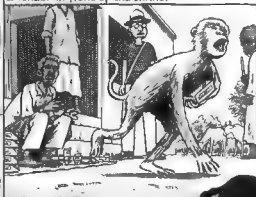
Meanwhile, we've arrived at one of three Hindu temples that Surendra wants to show us



This one is to the goddess Durga



One of them runs up and snatches something from a vendor in front of the shrine.

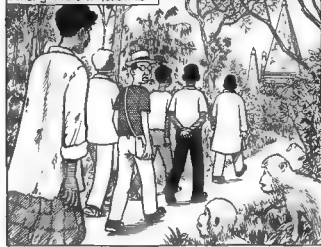


The lower forms watch us intently

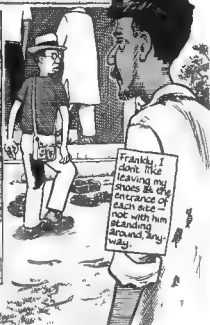
They give me the creeps



On the way to the next temple, dedicated to the god Shiva, I notice a particularly scruffy Bait peeling himself off from the other gawkers to follow us



Frankly, I don't like leaving my shoes at the entrance of each site - not with him standing around, anyway.



By the time we get to the shrine of the god Bhairav, I'm certain he's going to snatch my shoes.



But now he's following us over a wide, dusty area, and he seems more focused on Surendra than on me.



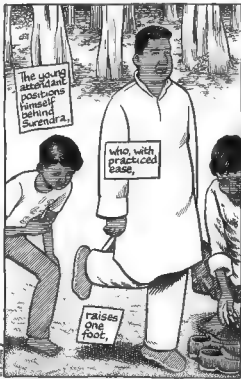
After a short ceremony at the tree, we head back to our shoes.



The young attendant positions himself behind Surendra,

who, with practiced ease,

raises one foot,



and then the other,



while the Dalit man, moving the shoes for the raja to step into.





And now it's time to see where Surendra's ancestors welcomed the Buddha.

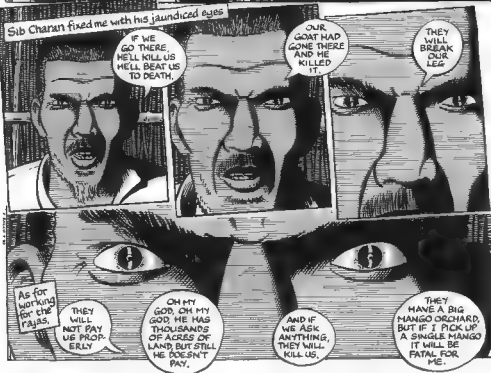


THEY WILL BREAK OUR LEG

Did I tell you what we were whispering in that that last day in Gurumita Maribola hamlet?

I had asked whether the Musahars there had the same charitable view of the rajas as the rajas had of themselves

For example, would they think of going to any of the rajas for help or advice?



Sib Charan fixed me with his jaundiced eyes

IF WE GO THERE, HE'LL KILL US. HE'LL BEAT US TO DEATH.

OUR GOAT HAD GONE THERE AND HE KILLED IT.

THEY WILL BREAK OUR LEG.

As for working for the rajas,

THEY WILL NOT PAY US PROPERLY.

OH MY GOD, OH MY GOD, HE HAS THOUSANDS OF ACRES OF LAND, BUT STILL HE DOESN'T PAY.

AND IF WE ASK ANYTHING, THEY WILL KILL US.

THEY HAVE A BIG MANGO ORCHARD, BUT IF I PICK UP A SINGLE MANGO IT WILL BE FATAL FOR ME.

And what about other higher caste people in the village?

How are your dealings with them?

THEY KEEP ON BEATING US

THEY DON'T LET US ENTER THEIR FIELDS

IF OUR CHILD GOES THERE THEY WILL BREAK HIS BONES

It was just then we noticed the teenage boys leaning in, crying to listen to us

A VANISHING RACE

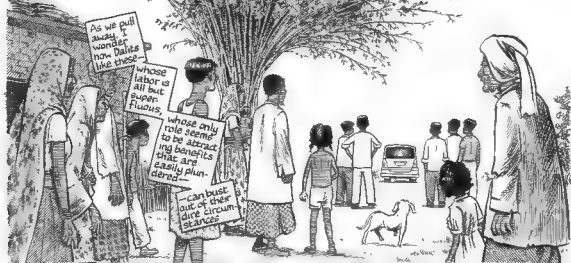
This is how our story ends!

Sib Charan tells us not to come back

Bheku adds,

BIG PEOPLE WILL GET ANNOYED

And those young, smirking boys, another generation of Green Shirts, escort us back to our car.



I pose the question to Choudhary.

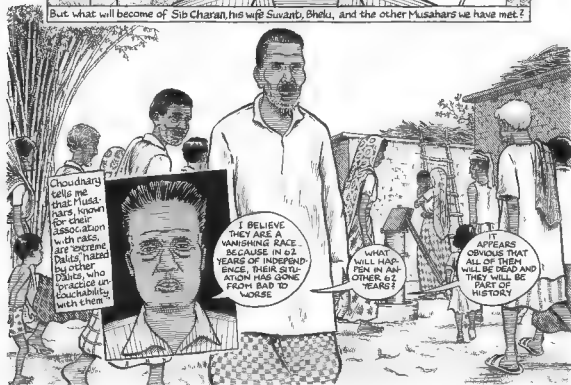
[WHEN] I WAS A POLITICAL ACTIVIST I USED TO TELL THEM TO EXERCISE THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS AND ASSERT THEMSELVES, BUT NOW I DON'T SAY ANYTHING BECAUSE I KNOW WHENEVER THEY START RESISTING, THEIR SITUATION WILL FURTHER WORSEN



THEY WILL BE ASSAULTED PHYSICALLY; THE POLICE WILL ARREST THEM...

WE CAN'T EXPECT THESE MOST POOR PEOPLE TO WAKE UP AND FIGHT AGAINST SUCH ODDS

But what will become of Sib Charan, his wife Suvant, Bhelu, and the other Musahars we have met?



The extraordinarily successful French magazine *XXI*, which specializes in long-form narrative journalism and doesn't take advertisements, is the publishing industry's greatest champion of comics reportage. It has regularly sent cartoonists out into the world and given them a good deal of magazine space—thirty pages each. Editor Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, a seasoned journalist himself, was open to any idea I had and supportive at every step of the way. Once I decided to draw a comic about poverty in India, the problem I had was narrowing my focus. I could have examined the notorious farmer suicides or the urban slums, but I wanted to get off the beaten track. The author Pankaj Mishra passed me along to Indian journalist Piyush Srivastava, who suggested I visit Kushinagar and who graciously agreed to be my guide. We met in Lucknow, where he is based, and drove for a day to reach the district, where many of the dalits—people regarded by many Indians as “untouchables”—

are experiencing not just abject poverty but real hunger. My idea was to go to one village and get to know its inhabitants well over the course of a week or so. As detailed in the story, after three visits to the same hamlet, Piyush and I were essentially chased out of the area by higher caste individuals who did not like us snooping around. We decided to visit other villages, but briefly, for no more than a couple of hours each, to avoid the same result. I would have preferred not to do such hit-and-run journalism, but it was unavoidable under the circumstances and had the benefit of giving us a broader survey of conditions in the area.

Kushinagar appeared originally in French in *XXI* no. 13, January/February/March 2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book encompasses stories from many trips to several countries over more than ten years and a full list of all those who have helped me along the way would go on for pages. Numerous journalists, fixers, translators, and others have schooled me, showed me how to be careful, and provided me with company and friendship. To them I am forever grateful.

But this time allow me to shift the focus away from colleagues in “the field” to acknowledge a few individuals who made a difference years before I got my first press pass. I am referring to certain teachers at Sunset High School in Portland, Oregon. (I had a few good professors in college too, but for me, as a whole experience, high school was more dense and intimate.)

I took my first journalism class from Brenda Holman. After she moved on, Sandra Ku took over. Both were superb instructors. I owe them a great debt for their encouragement and for instilling in me a love for rigorous news writing. They showed me that journalism was mostly fun and, when not quite fun, personally rewarding, which is how it has felt to me ever since, even under trying circumstances and even when the subject matter has been distasteful. Most important, they made me feel that good reporting mattered.

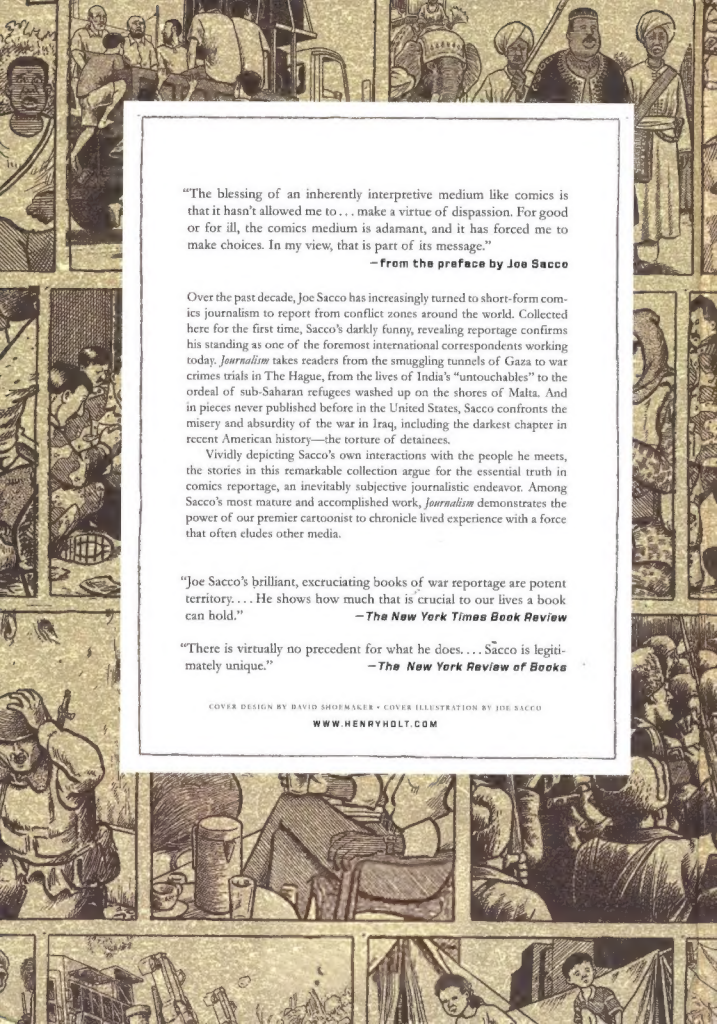
Hal Swafford was my history teacher. I didn’t need to be convinced that history was interesting,

but Mr. Swafford (I call him Hal now, but Mr. Swafford in this context sounds more appropriate) emphasized understanding the relationship between events rather than being able to recite them in the correct chronological order. “Think!” he used to command, tapping the side of his head, and he showed his students how. This book is dedicated to him and to Paul Copley, another esteemed teacher at Sunset High School, whose classes I never took but who entered my life decades later. Together with Hal and two Sunset grads, Rich LaSasso and Mike Stevens, I would meet Paul for drinks every few weeks at Cassidy’s in downtown Portland. Those meetings brought out the best in us, I think, and in me certainly. There is no bullshitting ex-high school teachers like Hal and Paul, no saying a bunch of nonsense without being able to back it up with facts, and their opinion of me and my thoughts still matters terribly. Paul’s passing was a real blow.

I also wish to thank my parents. I think they had misgivings about my studying journalism and even more misgivings when I seemed to give up journalism to draw comics. But they’re proud of me now and see the value in what I do, and doesn’t parental approval count as a victory in this world? Finally, I want to thank Amalie, who has put up with my long absences and never questioned my need to go places to see things. Leaving home with her heartfelt support has meant a great deal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JOE SACCO, one of the world's greatest cartoonists, is widely hailed as the creator of war reportage comics. He is the author of, among other books, *Palestine*, which received the American Book Award, and *Safe Area Goražde*, which received the Eisner Award for best graphic novel and was named a *New York Times* Notable Book and *Time* magazine's best comic book of 2000. His most recent book, *Footnotes in Gaza*, was the first graphic novel to win the Ridenhour Book Prize, was short-listed for a *Los Angeles Times* Book Award, and also received an Eisner Award. Sacco's work has been translated into fourteen languages and his comics reporting has appeared in *Details*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Time*, *Harper's*, and *The Guardian*, among other publications. He lives in Portland, Oregon.



"The blessing of an inherently interpretive medium like comics is that it hasn't allowed me to . . . make a virtue of dispassion. For good or for ill, the comics medium is adamant, and it has forced me to make choices. In my view, that is part of its message."

—from the preface by Joe Sacco

Over the past decade, Joe Sacco has increasingly turned to short-form comics journalism to report from conflict zones around the world. Collected here for the first time, Sacco's darkly funny, revealing reportage confirms his standing as one of the foremost international correspondents working today. *Journalism* takes readers from the smuggling tunnels of Gaza to war crimes trials in The Hague, from the lives of India's "untouchables" to the ordeal of sub-Saharan refugees washed up on the shores of Malta. And in pieces never published before in the United States, Sacco confronts the misery and absurdity of the war in Iraq, including the darkest chapter in recent American history—the torture of detainees.

Vividly depicting Sacco's own interactions with the people he meets, the stories in this remarkable collection argue for the essential truth in comics reportage, an inevitably subjective journalistic endeavor. Among Sacco's most mature and accomplished work, *Journalism* demonstrates the power of our premier cartoonist to chronicle lived experience with a force that often eludes other media.

"Joe Sacco's brilliant, excruciating books of war reportage are potent territory. . . . He shows how much that is crucial to our lives a book can hold."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"There is virtually no precedent for what he does. . . . Sacco is legitimately unique."

—*The New York Review of Books*

COVER DESIGN BY DAVID SHOEMAKER • COVER ILLUSTRATION BY JOE SACCO

WWW.HENRYHOLT.COM

